

AD AGENCIES' EXPECTATIONS: DO GRADUATES MAKE THE GRADE?

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ABSTRACT

While college coursework does not guarantee a new marketing graduate a job in the workplace, the more knowledge a graduate possesses, especially regarding career opportunities, employment trends, and the expectations of potential employers, the better prepared the graduate will be when seeking employment.

Advertising agencies can afford to be more selective than ever before when shopping around for an entry-level new graduate. One estimate indicated that as many as 15,000 students graduate each year with a degree in advertising to fill 5,000 available jobs. Since the advertising industry is at a point where it can demand high quality applicants and, at the same time, can pick and choose from an overflowing pool of talented people the question arises: Are colleges/universities educating their marketing graduates to compete in this environment?

Utilizing a sample of 500 advertising executives, this study explored respondents' attitudes toward the academic preparation of new graduates planning to enter the advertising field. Respondents represented a cross section of agencies in the United States, and 76.3% held the position of President or C.E.O. in the agencies polled.

Respondents' thoughts were also sought to gauge the importance of work/internship experiences, and personal skills and attributes of new graduates in hiring decisions. In addition, information was gathered on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of new graduates entering the advertising field.

Results indicated a majority of respondents felt that new graduates need a broad-based education combined with specific business/marketing coursework. Further analysis revealed that work experience/internships were high on the list of desired qualities in a new graduate. Most respondents felt that work experiences not only enhanced skills and allowed

new graduates to "hit the ground running," but also fostered a "work ethic" among new hires. Other data indicated that respondents felt that the greatest area of weaknesses in new graduates were in their communicative skills.

Further results disclosed that the majority of respondents felt a college degree was an important factor in hiring decisions. These respondents indicated that a college degree demonstrated that the prospective employee was "trainable" and that the degree entitled new graduates to an opportunity to compete for an entry-level position.

With the need for a degree established the data set revealed the most preferred college majors were (1) marketing; and, (2) liberal arts. Focusing on marketing specific courses, respondents ranked Marketing Theory and Marketing Principles as the most important courses. Most felt that these courses helped to firmly establish marketing majors in the basics.

To determine if grade point average (GPA) was an important factor in hiring decisions, findings showed that the majority felt that it was important while less than 20% felt a graduate's GPA was unimportant. Some respondents, however, noted a relationship between one's GPA and success in the workplace. Others noted that with competition so keen among new graduates, GPA is a discriminating factor in hiring decisions.

When queried as to whether or not they were satisfied with the quality of new marketing graduates, most replied that they were not. Only 29% responded in the affirmative. Most respondents, however, noted that the quality of marketing graduates has been improving recently.

The study reached conclusions based on the data set and proffered recommendations.