

MERLOT (MULTIMEDIA EDUCATION RESOURCE FOR LEARNING AND ONLINE TEACHING) FOR MARKETING PROFESSORS

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ABSTRACT

MERLOT is a free and open resource in which faculty can share learning materials. The modules in MERLOT are peer-reviewed by the Business Editorial Board and its Peer Reviewers. Faculty can gain recognition for their scholarship of teaching and can also provide service to the discipline by participating in the peer review process. There are approximately 400 modules in the Marketing discipline and the Editorial Board currently works with 20 Marketing peer reviewers. Faculty members are encouraged to participate in MERLOT by adding materials, using the materials of others, and being peer reviewers.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s the Internet was unveiled to the public making the technical, economic, and operational feasibility of distance education plausible. Using the Internet to locate and make digital learning objects accessible became yet another instructional strategy to enhance teaching and learning. However, creating one's own web based multimedia applications as well as searching the Internet to find existing teaching materials is without a doubt time consuming, especially when using some of the available search engines such as Google and Yahoo.

The solution is the free and open resource known as the MERLOT (Multimedia Education Resources for Learning and Online Teaching) repository, which is located at <http://www.merlot.org>. The mission of MERLOT is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning by expanding the quantity and quality of peer-reviewed learning materials that can be easily located and incorporated into functioning courses. Goals include making existing learning materials more accessible, providing recognition for the scholarship of teaching, and supplying a mechanism to validate and share high quality work.

SITE CONTENTS

MERLOT consists of thousands of digital learning objects with links to approximately 400 marketing-related teaching and learning modules. What makes MERLOT unique is the learning profile created for each module catalogued in the repository. The learning profile contains a brief description the digital

object, identifies the type of material, and provides a link to the actual module, member comments, peer reviews, and assignments, if applicable. In addition, each learning profile identifies the author and his or her affiliation, the Intended audience for the teaching materials, and any technical requirements necessary for using the module.

To facilitate locating useful teaching and learning materials, the MERLOT repository is searchable by discipline, sub-discipline, title, author, date, rating, item type or key word. Within the broad discipline of business, marketing materials are categorized as applicable to: business marketing, consumer behavior, advertising, sales, international, market research, and general marketing. Some of the Management modules can also be used in classes such as Sales Management.

Modules are identified as simulations, animations, tutorials, collections, quiz/tests, drill/practices, lecture/presentations, or reference materials and are cross-listed should they be relevant for more than one area. In addition, search results are ordered by quality based on peer reviews and member comments.

From the MERLOT home page, marketing faculty can browse materials, visit the Tasting Room, and become a member. Membership benefits include the opportunity to contribute teaching and learning materials that become eligible for peer review, as well as, add member comments or assignments to other modules.

In order to become a member, minimal information is required; one's last name and email address. Requiring membership to participate as a MERLOT contributor is designed to give other members a sense of each participant's role and subject interests in the educational community. In addition, a profile is created for each member that provides a record by date of an individual's contributions to MERLOT. Learning modules, member comments, and assignments contributed are catalogued. As a result, a member's MERLOT profile can be printed and included in an individual's portfolio as evidence of the scholarship of teaching for an annual performance review.

THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

MERLOT provides an opportunity for marketing faculty to be recognized for their contributions to the "scholarship of teaching." Once someone contributes a digital object to MERLOT, it becomes eligible for review. No less than two university professors who have met MERLOT standards and have been designated as external reviewers are assigned to examine a module.

Reviews are conducted by applying established evaluation standards and procedures. Each reviewer's write-up is posted online in a review workspace. The Assistant Editor of Marketing (currently, Theresa Flaherty at James Madison University) compiles a consolidated final review based on the input from the external reviewers. Notable discrepancies are discussed until a compromise is reached. When the peer review is finalized, the Editor sends a copy of the final review to the author(s) prior to it being posted publicly in MERLOT. Authors are given the opportunity to modify materials and have them reassessed as well as remove them from the repository.

A five star rating system is used to evaluate a digital learning object. Features of excellence and concern are identified for the following three criteria: quality of content, potential effectiveness as a teaching tool, and ease of use. A "one star" rating indicates the materials are not worth using at all. A "two star" rating indicates the materials do not meet minimal standards, but might have some limited value. Materials meeting or exceeding standards but having some significant concerns have a "three star" rating. A "four star" rating indicates materials are very good overall with a few minor concerns. Finally, learning materials judged excellent all around are given a "five star" rating.

Quality of content involves evaluating the accuracy and validity of the concepts being taught. Content receiving a "five star" rating should be clear, concise, accurate, current and relevant; completely demonstrate or explain concepts, models or skills; and include an adequate amount of material that effectively integrates and summarizes theories, assumptions and constraints. A high quality module is self-contained and can be used without requiring context or an assignment to make it useful.

Potential effectiveness as a teaching tool looks at whether prerequisite knowledge and learning objectives are identified, relationships between concepts demonstrated, and concepts progressively reinforced. Reviewers ascertain the extent to which it

would be easy to develop an assignment as a result of incorporating the module. They determine the module's efficiency with respect to whether much could be learned in a short time. Overall, assessing effectiveness means determining whether the media-rich materials are likely to improve a marketing instructor's ability to teach concepts and students' abilities to learn them.

Ease of use involves evaluating the extent to which the module is of a high design quality from a technical and instructional design standpoint given the type of material (simulation, tutorial, quiz/test, presentation, collection, etc.). Visual appeal, clarity of instructions, extent of participant interaction, and active engagement are among some of the other the ease of use characteristics reviewed. Are instructions clear and easy to follow? Does the module function as intended? As a result, the MERLOT ratings for quality of content, potential effective as a teaching tool, and ease of use, provide valuable guidance in helping others determine whether or not a specific module is worth considering for use with one's own marketing course.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, MERLOT is a viable resource for marketing instructors who wish to enhance instruction with technology. At the same time MERLOT champions the scholarship of teaching by providing an opportunity for those who design digital learning objects to receive recognition for their contributions. The quality of content expected by ERLOT indicates that a high level of discipline-related expertise is generally required to develop the materials. In many cases the resulting work is likely to break new ground and be innovative. As a result of being contributed to MERLOT, the teaching and learning materials become documented, are publicly available and have the potential to be peer reviewed. Furthermore, member comments and peer reviews lend credibility to the quality of the instructional pieces. As a result of providing access to the materials through MERLOT, teaching and learning modules can be replicated and improved on by other individuals. MERLOT enables marketing professors to make their pedagogical knowledge "community property" for peer review and commentary. As a result MERLOT is an electronic infrastructure that truly supports and sustains the scholarship of teaching.