

**DEVELOPING THE MARKETING PROFESSIONAL:  
COMBINING EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE**

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**ABSTRACT\***

As universities need to be more accountable to both students and employers, it is timely to consider what aspects of tertiary education and work experience contribute to the development of the marketing professional. This paper provides findings from a unique research project that interviewed marketing graduates with at least four years work experience and their employers about the development of the marketing professional.

The interviewed pairs (dyads) came from large and small organizations, representing a variety of industries (retail, advertising, manufacturing, consulting, publishing, finance, franchising) and marketing roles (sales, product management). The findings suggest that while there are differences between employers' and employees' perspectives on the essential skills and competencies required of new graduates, there is congruence between their views of what can only be learnt 'on the job'. There is also general recognition that 'on the job' learning is a critical component in the development of the marketing professional.

The key finding of this study is that generic skills coupled with an enthusiasm for marketing is the key to entry-level positions. However, after four years professional work experience, the balance shifts and marketing competencies, usually taught in the later years of a degree, become crucial to the continuing

success of the marketing professional. Therefore, the important contribution that this study makes is to clarify the confusion between academic and practitioner views on marketing skills and competencies. We identified that previous research focused on novice professionals and over emphasised the significance of generic skills. While these remain important, this research demonstrates the significance of marketing skill development over time and in situ.

The focus of current marketing education is about developing specific marketing skills and knowledge. Employers are more concerned with general business skills, how quickly the graduate can adapt to the organizational culture and acquire a good understanding of business environment. The gaps between the role of marketing educators and the expectations of business appear to relate to a lack of understanding of each groups' role in the development of the marketing professional.

There is scope therefore for synergistic collaboration between the educators and the employers in the development of the marketing professional. This research has implications for students, graduates, employers and universities.

\*The list of references and interview guidelines can be provided upon request.