INCORPORATING THE GOOGLE ONLINE MARKETING CHALLENGE INTO CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

A Google representative and four professors who participated in the Google Online Marketing Challenge discussed this pedagogical tool. Session topics included: Challenge adoption considerations; getting up to speed on AdWords; their Challenge experiences; Challenge learning objectives; instructor pitfalls; common student mistakes and benefits; student complaints; and integrating the Challenge into marketing courses.

The Google Online Marketing Challenge, Google's inaugural business student competition, ran from February to May 2008 and runs again from January to May 2009. Similar to other Google initiatives, the scale seems huge. About 200 professors representing approximately 8,000 students in 47 countries competed in the inaugural Challenge. Predictions are at least double the numbers in 2009. Student teams had $200 (U.S.) in AdWords, Google's flagship advertising product that accounts for over 90 percent of Google's revenue, to drive traffic to a small- to medium-sized enterprise (SME) website.

Unlike most student competitions that simulate real world conditions or craft hypothetical marketing plans, students in the Google Online Marketing Challenge developed and implemented online marketing campaigns for real clients, and spent real money. During the three-week contest, students accessed detailed, individualized reports and adjusted their campaigns accordingly. In addition to hands-on experience conducting online marketing campaigns, students gained the experience of acting as consultants for SMEs.

Another difference from most student competitions is a focus on the educational experience. In addition to competing on campaign metrics, the student teams submitted two written reports. The first report, a pre-campaign strategy, overviews the client's business and how the AdWords campaign aligns with the client's objects. The second report, after the campaign, addresses three pedagogical areas: learning objectives and outcomes; group dynamics and client dynamics; and future recommendations.

An important goal of marketing education is helping students grasp the relevance of topics discussed in the classroom. A complementary goal of many professors is to develop positive liaisons with the local business community. Similarly, many universities struggle with ways to become relevant in their local communities. The Google Online Marketing Challenge helps achieve these goals.