

Self-Marketing: Bridging the Gap

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A recent report by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching says that there is a disturbing gap between college and the "real world," and that there has been a dramatic increase in the emphasis on "careerism."

What our colleges and universities have been doing has been to respond to declining enrollments with offerings that raise the expectations of employment after graduation. What we have neglected to do is to teach students how to market themselves. As a result, many students have found their expectations to be unrealistic and are disappointed with the career opportunities available to them after graduation.

Faculty members usually assume that the career placement centers will take care of this problem. Except, perhaps, for the most prestigious schools, this does not happen. The placement centers, often under-funded and understaffed, do help the student whose specialty is in short supply or where, traditionally, campus recruiting has been the channel used for entry level positions.

Even in this instance, the number who find this channel of value is small. A recruiter for a Fortune 500 company told the writer that he did four to five-hundred interviews a year, and only had twelve positions to fill. Major companies use the campus interview as a public relations ploy as much as they do for recruiting.

A recent study by the writer of last years graduating class of an urban private University revealed that out of 270 responses, only twenty-six obtained their jobs through the placement office. Of these, twenty were in the fields of engineering and accounting.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a role that marketing educators can play in bridging this gap between academia and the "real world." We define marketing as satisfying needs and wants through exchange processes. Here is a need that we can satisfy by teaching our students how to use marketing principles to market themselves; how to further their own careers by satisfying the needs and wants of an employer through a mutually profitable exchange.

Many students look at marketing as being synonymous with selling, an activity that most of them do not want to be associated with. By teaching them how to market themselves, we not only teach them marketing principles in a relevant way, but can change the perception of personal selling as a part of the promotional mix.

Background:

In response to the requests of many stu-

dents, nearing graduation for information on how to find a job, the writer developed a two quarter hour special topics course called "Self-marketing." After two years this was adopted into the marketing curriculum as an elective.

The course is taught without a textbook. It consists of completing exercises that, taken together, culminate in the development of a marketing plan for the student.

There is a workbook that is used in the Harvard University MBA program that contains many activities that would be useful in a course of this type, but does not have marketing principles as a background.¹

The two sources of information, aside from marketing literature, for information for this course are the popular press and the academic journals. The popular press consists of how-to-do-it books and articles based upon the opinions of the authors as derived from their own personal experiences. They all contain some information that may be appropriate and useful to the individual student, but none cover all of the areas of marketing in the depth that is necessary for a good plan.

The academic journals, particularly those in the area of applied psychology, are rich in studies containing information that is relevant to the self-marketing process. These, unfortunately, rarely find their way into the popular press. The personnel journals, in particular, enable the student to get a glimpse of the process from the employer's point of view.

The Normative Model.

Students usually think of marketing in terms of the consumer model. The appropriate model for this course is the industrial model of marketing. Many of the recommendations contained in the popular press are more appropriate to the consumer market, such as the mass mailing of resumes to lists of companies that have not been qualified as prospects and where the needs are unknown. The industrial model is appropriate because:

- o The buying (hiring) motives are more rational and are more likely to be based on product specifications (job descriptions).
- o There are fewer buyers, and they may be concentrated by industry. If you want a career in aerospace, for example, you're pretty well limited to California, Texas, and Washington.
- o Responsibilities for purchasing (hiring) are shared more frequently among a number of individuals.

- o The demand for products (employees) in the industrial market is a derived demand. The number of employees a business requires is directly dependent upon the demand for their products or services by the ultimate consumer or use.
- o Industry demand may be inelastic while the demand facing the individual seller (job-seeker) is very elastic.

Adopting the industrial model gives some direction as to the relative weight given the various part of the marketing mix and the promotional mix, in particular.

Course Content.

It is assumed that the student has already made some basic decisions as to career direction. If they have not, this is one area where the counseling or testing center can be of help. Tests such as the Strong-Campbell Vocational Interest Inventory can point out the areas that they would enjoy working in, and therefore would probably be good at. Having a focus is extremely important. The students enrolled in the self-marketing class who had a definite focus on what they wanted to do were much more successful in finding suitable employment, and did so in a shorter period of time than those who did not know exactly what they wanted to do or would do anything.

Product Knowledge:

Since product is the heart or crux of any marketing mix, it is essential that the student have an in-depth knowledge of his or her strengths and weaknesses as well as the particular talents and abilities that they can bring to the potential employer.

One assessment tool that has proven to be invaluable is the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator.² This is a self-administered test that has been validated over many thousands of samples. It is based on Jungian psychology and places everyone in one of sixteen character and temperament types. Used in conjunction with an interpretative book by Kiersey and Bates which specifically address temperament in management, this instrument has provided some real insights into individual strengths and weaknesses.³

The students are also required to develop a self-concept profile. This may be done by developing a scale using di-polar adjectives, or using an instrument such as the Interpersonal Style Inventory Profile used in the Clawson workbook.⁴ This provides a profile as they see themselves, as they would like to see themselves, and as others see them.

To ascertain specific strengths the students are required to make a list of twenty personal accomplishments, not necessarily business related. An accomplishment is defined as some-

thing they did, that they enjoyed doing and were proud of. Students typically believe that they do not have any experience. When forced to examine their accomplishments they are always pleasantly surprised not only by how much experience they do have, but how much of it would be transferable to the job they are seeking. It is suggested that they maintain this as a personal data base and add to it in the future as they gain more experience.

Marketing Channels:

One of the problems that students have in developing their marketing strategies is that they approach the process in exactly the reverse order that companies do when they are filling a human resource need. The first thing that students do is read the want-ads. The last thing a company does is place a want-ad.

The first thing a company does is to look internally to see if there is anyone presently in the organization that can fill the position. If there isn't anyone, then they will ask their present employees if they know of anyone that would make a good candidate. It has been estimated that approximately eighty percent of the jobs, and most of the good ones, are never advertised. The channel used to learn of these openings is the one we call networking. Eighty of the students in the aforementioned study indicated that they obtained their jobs through networking. To demonstrate networking, the students are required to make a list of twenty people that they know personally who are employed, together with the name of the employer. These are then collated and, with a class of twenty, a network of 375 plus has been created.

Other channel members such as employment agencies and executive recruiters are discussed in class. The emphasis on dealing with employment agencies is to deal only with those agencies where the employer pays the fee. Employer's will do this if the skill sought is a scarce one, and they have not been able to fill the position themselves.

Executive recruiter's are retained for higher-level positions so contacting them for an entry level position would invariably be a waste of time.

Market Segmentation:

Typically the student is looking for the smallest segment possible: a customer base of one. This makes it even more important that this segment be identified and located.

Some of the questions that the student must answer are:

- What industry or industries would the likely customers be in?
- Should it be in the public sector or private sector?

- Should it be a large company or a small one?
- Are there any geographical preferences?

Rather than a mass campaign, it is more efficient and effective to target market, to select a small number of companies who may need the talents and abilities that the student has and for whom the student may like to work.

Market Research:

Students have an opportunity to do both primary and secondary market research.

They select a company in the area that is publicly held and first go to the library and find out as much about the company as they can. By looking in directories and publications they become acquainted with the company's history, its present position, and future trends. Many libraries keep files of annual reports. Stock brokers can afford them copies of SEC filings, etc.

They are also required to do an on-premise informational interview (primary research). The purpose of the informational interview is to gather more information about the company, not to ask for a job. Specific information about the company's needs, what their hiring process is like, what do they look for in the people they hire, etc.

It is important to assure the company that this is not a subterfuge. It is being done by a student as part of a class assignment. The level of contact is not as important as the on-premise visit itself. For example, female students can tell quite a bit about how the company views women employees by looking at the condition of the women's washroom. The way employees dress can also be observed.

Students have had pleasant experiences. They have also learned that a particular company is one that they would not like to work for if offered a job.

Promotion:

Most students come into the class believing that if they have a good resume, this will get them the job they desire. They also believe they have to send out hundred's of resumes.

The theory is that if you throw enough mud on the wall, some of it will stick. The problem with this theory is that if they do get a job using this approach, it may not be one that is appropriate for them or that fills only their financial needs. There is nothing wrong with filling financial needs but this should not be confused with a career position and should not be considered the end of the process.

The other problem with this approach is that it does not fit the model we are using. It is

not only a waste of resources, but invites a great deal of unnecessary rejection which is something that the student does not need.

They are taught to write functional resumes that permit them to show their abilities to the greatest advantage, rather than chronological resumes which may be preferred by the personnel professional because it is easier to find reasons to de-select the applicant. At the level of the personnel professional, the process is one of de-selection rather than selection. They usually have many more applicants than they have openings, particularly if the job has been advertised.

The objective in writing the resume then is to avoid volunteering information that would lead to your de-selection. As a rule of thumb, any information that is not job-related can be avoided.

The resume and cover letter are similar to the print advertising used by industrial firms. In perspective, while they should be well done, they are not the most important part of the promotional mix. Their primary purpose is to get an interview. Theoretically, if an interview could be obtained without a resume, the latter would not be necessary.

The interview is analagous to personal selling which is the most important part of the promotional mix for industrial firms. A great deal of stress is placed on the interview process. The problem with most of the sample interview questions and answers that have been given to students is that both the questions and answers have become cliches. Mock interviews are conducted using video-tape, and the student is encouraged to develop truthful responses that are unique to them, rather than something the interviewer may have heard many times before.

Other.

Students are also required to do secondary research to determine the salary range in their field of interest.

Tests used in pre-employment screening are also discussed, as are the laws applying to employment.

After completing all of the exercises, the students have all of the ingredients necessary for a personal marketing plan.

¹James G. Clawson, et al. Self Assessment and Career Development. 2nd Ed. Englewood Cliffs, J.J.: Prentice Hall, 1985.

²Katherine C. Briggs and Isabel Briggs Meyers. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Pstchologists Press, Inc. 1976.

³David Kiersey and Marilyn Bates, Please Understand Me. Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesi Book Company, 1984.

⁴Clawson. op. cit., pp. 46-64.