

AN ACTION LEARNING APPROACH TO SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND ANALYTICS

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A recent industry survey identified significant shortages of available talents needed to support the hiring demand in areas of marketing that used social media, content, mobile platforms and analytics (Online Marketing Institute, 2013). To stay responsive to the marketplace, marketers resorted to reskilling and outsourcing talents to improve performance in delivering a relevant and integrated customer experience.

With the rapidly growing industry demand in social media and analytics management, marketing educators have proposed several different courses of action to enhance the social media competency of students. Some have suggested the use of experiential learning (Hazari, Brown, & Rutledge, 2013; Lowe & Laffey, 2011; Payne et al., 2011; Rinaldo, Tapp & Laverie, 2011), while others have made steps to bring Social Media Marketing into the classroom. Several introductory marketing textbooks incorporate a chapter in Social Media Marketing (e.g., Kerin, Hartley, & Rudelius, 2013), while Wymbbs (2011) appeals to marketing educators for the introduction an entire digital marketing curriculum designed to meet the emerging needs of students and businesses.

This paper proposes that a practicum, catered towards students interested in digital marketing, be added to the curriculum. This practicum would adopt an Action Learning approach (Young, 2010) to enhance student knowledge of social media, content creation, and analytics. Using student newspapers as examples, we have created and implemented a Digital Media and Marketing practicum for marketing students. It is an on-going project in (1) building, growing and maintaining a social network, as well as in (2) creating and managing digital contents that serve various target personas in a community of marketing students, alumni, and friends. Student teams have created digital contents that promote:

- events (e.g., competitions, speakers, job fairs, fund raising),
- resources (e.g., internships, scholarships, study tours, industry news and trends),
- marketing news and issues (e.g., current affairs) as well as
- discussions within the social network of students, alumni, and businesses.

Besides the experience of creating content on various social and digital media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, Google+, and blogs, student teams will gain experience in tracking media analytics on dashboards, and applying content and media strategies to enhance key performance indicators.

Assessing analytics and devising strategies are the most valuable skills that students can acquired through a practicum which is more extensive than a class project. This learning process also develops teamwork and leadership skills that can prepare students for a higher than entry level job in the industry.

Furthermore, students participate and help in growing the Social Network that connects current students, alumni, faculty, friends and supporters in the community. Such a network can potentially enhance public interest in the institution, support collaborative activities of constituents, and serve the common good.

In the first phase of the practicum, student teams explore the needs of social networking among the target audience, identify the appropriate media, and experiment in content creation for the community on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. In the second phase, research teams conduct interviews and surveys to identify the needs and profiles of key personas. Teams in the third phase select target personas to serve, develop campaign strategies, create contents, and

track analytics on four platforms. In the end, each team makes a video of a slide presentation that highlights their team's learning experiences, and compiles a report documenting the campaign process and its performance (Exhibit 1).

The research will study the effectiveness of the learning approach, and evaluate the following learning outcomes:

1. Skills in managing key social media networks,
2. Experience in engaging personas on key social media platforms,
3. Knowledge of social media metrics, and
4. Confidence in managing an online community via social networks.

References Available upon Request