

## GUIDED DESIGN: A NEW CONCEPT IN AN OLD GUISE

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Teaching marketing courses involving professional perspectives to undergraduate students is a challenging task. The principal problem is developing insight into the decision-making perspective of professionals within the field. This problem has been particularly apparent in the field of physical distribution management because it differs so substantially from other areas of marketing.

One way to overcome this problem and which has application to other areas of marketing is the use of guided design. This is a technique developed by Professor Charles Wales in the School of Engineering at West Virginia University for use with freshmen engineering students. However it has application to a variety of fields within marketing.

Guided design is essentially an extension of the case approach. The steps to solve a guided design case are similar to those used in normal business cases. The difference is that the guided design case is actually a series of decisions which are part of the case, but which are solved individually by students in groups. They are given an initial set of materials on the case, with the instructions for the initial decision. When the decision is made, they review the decision with the instructor who then gives them material reviewing the decision, called "feedback" and provides them with a new instruction. The process then involves a series of decisions, reviews and new instructions.

The key to development of guided design is in the materials. These must be prepared in advance. Once the case is in operation, each group works independently, so that the process affords little opportunity for new direction. When they are finished, each group presents their results to the class. The learning can then be evaluated by assigning a similar case to students to do individually.

Developing the materials involves four steps:

1. selecting the subject matter
2. generating problems which are related to the subject matter that the instructor wishes the students to consider
3. selecting the problem on the basis of the learning objectives
4. writing the case which involves laying out a series of steps which students will work through in performing the case.

Application of the guided design approach has been demonstrated in a course in physical distribution. Three cases have been written:

one involving design of a marketing channel, one involving inventory control systems and a third dealing with analysis of a logistics system. The channel design case is based on an actual case history of a garment manufacturer faced with changing markets and channel requirements. The actual design of the case follows the steps emphasized in most case presentation techniques with the exceptions that specific points dealing with channel design concept were singled out for special emphasis.

The second case inventory control systems was less successful. It involved presumed prior knowledge of computer operations and inventory which many students did not have. The case was later converted into a series of individual exercises.

The third case was written to "wrap-around" a case that had been previously published elsewhere. It involves analysis of an entire system. The addition of guided design permitted the case to be treated holistically which preserves the system emphasis but at the same time permits the tasks to be divided into a series of smaller steps.

As a pedagogical device, guided design has both advantages and difficulties. Its advantages are:

1. It places the student in a professional decision-making role while learning concepts of the field.
2. Students can participate collectively and actively in their own learning experience.
3. It enables problems to be developed within a deliberate structure so that individual parts can be emphasized.

The disadvantages are:

1. The case once started operates almost autonomously of the instructor. Instructions must be clear and unambiguous.
2. There may be difficulties in maintaining a uniform pace among all groups.
3. There is physical limit on class size, because of the number of groups involved.
4. There may be a wide variety of difficulties from one time to the next because of the variations in preparation prior to the class.
5. The length of time that a case will take cannot be predicted precisely in advance, which may present difficulties if precise scheduling is necessary.

Guided design, despite its drawbacks is a valuable teaching tool. Like other approaches, it must be used in balance. However in combination with these other approaches, it provides a richer classroom experience.

Schneider, Lewis M., James L. Heskett, Robert M. Ivie, and Nicholas Glaskowsky, Cases in Business Logistics (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1973).

Wales, Charles A. and Robert A. Stager, Guided Design (Charleston, West Virginia, published by the authors, 1977).