

MARKETING OUR MAJORS

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ABSTRACT

The employment market for undergraduate marketing majors is examined by documenting what firms look for and how they find entry level job applicants. Viewing graduates as products and employers as consumers, the data are analyzed in traditional marketing categories: the target market, the benefits sought, the product features sought, distribution, promotion, and price. Implications for curricula are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The challenge to a changing business school curriculum is to find the proper balance between the sometimes competing goals of serving the business community and providing the most current academic/technical material to our students. Whether we see ourselves as bearers of facts, molders of minds, tutors in skills, or preparers of future graduate students, we are also producers of future job applicants for entry level marketing positions.

Since we are in the business of producing graduates who can obtain and succeed in entry level marketing positions, it is incumbent upon us as marketers to understand our market and to satisfy our customers. Studies of companies who hire MBA's have documented the needs of that market. Jenkins, Reizenstein, and Rodgers (1984) found executives to be dissatisfied with MBA's analytical abilities, level of initiative, and specific functional knowledge. Beam's (1981) survey of Fortune 500 personnel directors found that poor writing skills was the most frequently mentioned weakness of young executives. And while Yates (1983) confirms the importance of writing skills, Budd (1982) notes that graduate business students should receive instead more training in the philosophical/psychological aspects of communication.

This study represents an effort to understand the market for undergraduate marketing majors. To do so I asked marketing practitioners about their product needs, means of finding applicants (distribution), responsiveness to promotion, and the price (salary) they are willing to pay.

In the following discussion I treat the university or marketing department as the manufacturer of the product, the student as the product, and potential employers as the market. While the analogy to a commercial product or service might at times be strained, I think this offers a useful framework for discussion and some interesting implications for curriculum development.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were gathered through a mail survey of members of the Southern California chapter of the American Marketing Association. The 1986 SCAMA Membership Roster & Service Directory provided the sampling frame. Because the unit of analysis for this study was companies as employers my population was the companies represented in the SCAMA membership rather than SCAMA members themselves.

I exhausted the population of 657 companies listed in the directory. For each company listed in the directory, the SCAMA member listed was contacted. If there were more than one member in a company, the top ranking member was chosen.

Questionnaires were mailed in May, 1987. There were no follow up mailings. One hundred fifty nine valid responses were received and 43 questionnaires were returned as undeliverable, yielding a response rate of 26 percent.

Respondents are representative of the population on the one variable for which we have data: type of business. Market research companies constitute 23 percent of the population and 26 percent of the respondents. Although this makes us feel comfortable about generalizing to the population represented in the sampling frame, it must also be noted that the sampling frame itself probably overrepresents the universe of market research companies.

A mailing list of marketing professionals compiled by Zeller and Letticia indicate that just over 10 percent of marketing professionals are in research.

Given these data, I included a weight factor which weighted market research companies .38 and all other companies 1.22 (this maintained the n of 159). Breakdowns of self-identified type of business of the unweighted and weighted samples are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

Respondent's Type of Business

	Unweighted	Weighted
Advertising	13.8	16.8
Consumer Goods Manufr	9.4	11.5
Industrial Goods Manufr	15.7	19.1
Marketing Research	26.4	10.6
Retail	1.9	2.3
Service	23.9	29.0
Consulting	5.0	6.1
Other	3.8	4.6

While this weight factor adjusts for the overrepresentation of marketing research firms, it does not adjust for any other over or underrepresentations. It is with this caveat in mind that the following data must be viewed.

FINDINGS

Target Market

The target market for our product -- entry level marketing employees -- can be thought of as either the type of business which is seeking to hire or the type of jobs available. In both cases our main concern is market potential measured by size of the market in number of positions expected to be filled. Knowledge of target consumers will permit us to direct our product to the market most likely to buy by offering courses that provide appropriate specialization.

Table 2

Entry Level Positions Expected / Type of Business (n = 478)

Advertising	16%
Consumer Goods Manufacturer	17
Industrial Goods Manufacturer	17
Marketing Research	7
Retail	*
Service	26
Consulting	13
Other	4

*less than 1%

Table 3

Entry Level Positions Expected by Type of Job (n = 478)

Advertising	20%
International Marketing	1
Marketing Research	22
Sales	40
Retail Management	1
Transportation and Distribution	3
Product and Brand Management	10
Industrial Marketing	3

As can be seen in the tables above, for our sample, jobs are most available with advertising companies, consumer and industrial goods manufacturers, and service companies. Most jobs are in sales with the next highest in marketing research and advertising.

Product

As marketers we know that the core of every product is the benefits it provides to the buyer. In the case of our student product these benefits might best be conceptualized as the skills employers want new employees to bring to the workplace.

Based on research cited above, an item in the questionnaire asked how important each of seven skills were for an entry level marketing employee. Table 4 presents these responses.

Table 4

	Importance of Selected Skills					Mean
	Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important			
Administrative	13	37	39	8	3	3.49
Oral com	66	28	6	0	0	4.60
Written com	64	31	4	1	0	4.60
Interpersonal	57	36	6	1	0	4.50
Analytical	42	40	17	1	0	4.23
Quantitative	20	40	36	4	0	3.75
Computer	15	28	41	12	5	3.36

F = 45.997 P < .01

What employers need most from entry level employees are oral communication, written communication, and interpersonal skills. If students are to learn these skills within the context of marketing, we must teach them through projects and classroom activities that go beyond the text/lecture/examination format.

The next most important need is analytical skills, a set of abilities which should be emphasized in all upper division courses, especially case courses and research courses. Next most important are quantitative skills, again likely to be the preserve of case courses and research courses.

Least needed from entry level employees are administrative and computer skills. It is possible that employers feel that these skills will not be utilized by new recruits. More likely, practitioners probably feel that these skills will be learned on the job. Since almost half of respondents considered these skills to be in one of the top two importance ratings, however, course work and projects which stress these skills should not be eliminated from the curriculum.

These are the core benefits sought by our customers. Our product is, however, an existing one, not a discontinuous innovation, so we must ask if the current product is meeting consumer need or if we need to modify it. As such, I asked respondents how satisfied they were with each of these skills among current entry level marketing employees. On a whole respondents are "somewhat satisfied" with all of these skills among their current entry level employees. (Data not shown.)

Since satisfactions are all within the "somewhat" range while importance on several skills is at the "extremely" level, we can deduce a greater discrepancy between need and satisfaction for the most important skills. In order to more clearly examine these discrepancies, I computed a satisfaction/importance difference score. Each

individual's score on satisfaction with a particular skill was subtracted from his or her score on the importance of that skill. This score shows the relationship between perceived level of importance and level of satisfaction and tells us how disappointed buyers might be with the current product. The results are presented in Table 5, below.

Table 5

Difference Between Skill Importance/ Satisfaction

	-4	-3	-2	0	+1	+2	+3	Mean	
Admin	0	2	11	29	34	18	6	1	-.25
Oral com	3	5	31	30	27	5	0	0	-1.14
Written com	8	11	33	21	23	4	0	0	-1.46
Interper	1	3	26	28	38	3	1	0	-.91
Analytical	2	5	22	34	34	3	0	0	-.97
Quant	1	3	11	29	44	9	3	0	-.47
Computer	1	1	11	19	36	23	7	0	-.08

F = 15.044 P < .01

Levels of satisfaction with administrative and computer skills and to a lesser extent quantitative skills are about commensurate with their attributed levels of importance. While the aggregate satisfaction measure showed respondents to be "somewhat satisfied" with these skills, the discrepancy measure suggests that those who are more satisfied are the ones who perceive them to be more important and those who are less satisfied are the ones who perceive them to be less important. It will be recalled that these three were the least important of the skills needed.

For the other four skills -- oral communication, written communication, interpersonal, and analytical -- the high discrepancy scores are consistent with the high importance but moderate satisfaction ratings. It is especially important to note the high level of disappointment with written communication skills.

Beyond the needs sought by the buyer or core product is the tangible product -- the background and experience features that will be the content of resumes. We can influence this tangible product through the advising process. To identify desired product features, the study included a question on the importance of five areas of student experience. Table 6 presents these data.

The single most important tangible feature the product can have is work experience in marketing. If students cannot get work in marketing, they should do an internship in marketing or get non-marketing work experience.

Undergraduate Grade Point Average is also seen as an important product feature. Least important is leadership positions held in extra-curricular activities. So we should advise students to get on-the-job experience and to earn the highest grades possible. To the extent that these come into conflict, as product planners, rather than

Table 6

Importance of Selected Activities

	Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important	Mean		
Leadership	10	24	42	14	10	3.13
Undergrad GPA	7	45	38	6	3	3.47
Work in mrkting	44	35	13	7	1	4.16
Work out mrkting	6	43	34	15	2	3.36
Intern mrkting	18	34	27	13	8	3.42

F = 30.043 P < .01

as academics, we would tolerate sacrificing grades for marketing experience.

Though we need not discourage students from participating in extra-curricular activities, we should make such participation contingent upon keeping grades up. Extra-curricular activities are not a substitute for off campus work, nor are they a valid trade off for good grades.

Distribution

The survey examined the efficacy of two intermediaries which firms might use to find entry level employees. These means are analogous to traditional channels of distribution. On campus placement is similar to a manufacturer's sales office or manufacturer's showroom. It is a process conducted by the seller (the university) rather than by an independent wholesaler. Employment agencies are similar to brokers in that they facilitate buying and selling and are paid by the party that hired them.

Table 7

Use of Recruitment Intermediaries*

On campus placement (mfr showroom)	28%
Employment agencies (brokers)	25
No intermediaries used	56

*multiple response item; totals exceed 100%

Based on the data in Table 8, students should not count on manufacturer intermediaries (placement office or agencies) to find them jobs. More successful routes are suggested by an examination of Promotion.

Promotion

Three types of promotion were examined: word of mouth, unsolicited resumes, and ads placed by the employer. The results are presented in Table 8.

Employer initiated communications (word of mouth and ads) are used more frequently than manufacturer (or in our case, product) initiated communications, though self-promotion is a viable avenue.

I asked respondents who found entry level applicants through advertising, which publications they used. Just over 40 percent cited the Los Angeles Times. Five percent cited the Orange County Register and about 20 percent

Table 8

How Firms Find Entry Level Employees*

Ads placed by employer	61
Word of mouth	53
Unsolicited resumes	47

*multiple response item; totals exceed 100%

stated "local newspapers" or "newspapers." Six percent each used the Wall Street Journal and AMA publications, and 15 percent used Ad Age or Ad Week.

Price

what should potential employees ask for or expect in remuneration? Average salaries by type of business and type of job are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9

Average Salary by Type of Business

Advertising	\$19,810
Consumer Goods Manufacturer	22,893
Industrial Goods Manufacturer	24,705
Marketing Research	18,664
Retail	23,167
Service	25,771
Consulting	23,100
Other	27,300

F = 4.041 P < .01

Table 10

Average Salary by Type of Job

Advertising	\$21,035
International Marketing	29,400
Marketing Research	24,265
Sales	26,703
Retail Management	20,000
Transportation and Distribution	24,800
Product and Brand Management	24,650
Industrial Marketing	29,667

(given organization of data, no stat possible)

Advertising and marketing research companies pay the least. Yet, while advertising is a relatively low paid job no matter who the employer is, marketing research would seem to be low paid only when the employer is a research supplier as differentiated from a consumer manufacturer, service, or consulting firm.

The highest paying jobs are to be found in international marketing and industrial marketing, though it will be recalled from our discussion of target markets that these fields are among the lowest in number of expected job openings.

CONCLUSION

As marketers of a product in a relatively

saturated market (each responding company expected to fill an average of 3 positions this year), we should consider pursuing market segmentation, product modification and marketing-mix modification strategies.

The data from this study suggest the majority of jobs available are in sales, advertising, and marketing research. In order to best target these jobs we might want to offer advanced courses in each of these areas or perhaps permit subspecializations within the Marketing program.

It is also apparent from the data that our product needs to be redesigned -- a "new and improved marketing major." Consumers (future employers) are looking for applicants with good oral and written communication skills and good interpersonal and analytical skills; they are disappointed. If we are to satisfy our market we must improve the quality of our product by developing curricula that integrate these skills into our courses. In addition to improving quality, we should also improve features by directing students to focus on work experience (preferably in marketing) and grades rather than extra-curricular activities.

Students may have unrealistic perceptions of the marketing-mix elements -- distribution, promotion, and price. Students should not count on the university placement office or employment agencies and search firms to find jobs for them. Their promotional strategies must be "pounding the pavements" -- responding to ads, networking, and mailing out resumes "blind." They should expect salaries in the low \$20's, lower if they are going into advertising or seeking employment with a marketing research firm.

Universities that are not among the top ranked should also consider pursuing market niches strategies developing specializations which will permit them to identify and serve companies which do not recruit from among the market leaders.

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