

GUERRILLA MARKETING PLANS

Brian Baldus, California State University, Sacramento

Client-based learning can provide transformative learning experiences for students and educators as well as valuable services to the business community (Cooke & Williams, 2004; Klink & Athaide, 2004; Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009). Accreditors and higher education stakeholders are increasingly asking universities and faculty to incorporate innovation, impact, and engagement into the classroom to prepare graduates for a more dynamic business environment (AACSB 2013). Client-based learning actively engages students in the course material and can enhance student success.

Client or project-based learning is often viewed as the sine qua non of innovative, impactful, and engaging marketing education because it gives students valuable experiences and develops important skills (e.g., Berrett, 2013). To this end, marketing students are often assigned into teams to develop marketing plans for companies. These traditional plans are typically written over the course of the semester and incorporate a variety of major marketing topics such as marketing principles, management, research, and strategy. Changing the template for a marketing plan assignment has the potential to better engage students in the material and provide valuable services to local businesses.

While traditional marketing plans provide experience working as a team on a real marketing problem, they can have several important deficiencies. First, a common deficiency of marketing plans is that students typically devote a majority of the plan describing the company and its operations, rather than applying course concepts. Second, traditional marketing plans are often geared to large organizations with well-established needs and functional areas; consequently traditional marketing plans may not fit the needs of small to medium sized businesses. Third, traditional marketing plans tend to be geared to one to five years which is a very long timeframe for students to try to forecast how the business environment will change. Thus, traditional marketing plan assignments can end up reading more like a book report on a company than a roadmap geared to address specific challenges the company is facing but does not have the time, resources, or expertise to address.

Student created marketing plans that primarily describe the company call into question whether students are sufficiently engaged in the material enough to apply course concepts in a meaningful way. Furthermore, businesses receiving marketing plans like this are not likely to receive enough value to keep them coming back semester after semester to work with students. Therefore, I propose a new marketing plan format, called a “Guerrilla Marketing Plan,” to engage students more fully in course concepts and enhance the value of the marketing plans to clients. The essence of the Guerrilla Marketing Plan is designed to benefit small to medium size local businesses by concisely focusing on a single marketing challenge with a specified budget and timeframe of several months. The Guerrilla Marketing Plan format encourages students to think creatively and focus on getting maximum results from minimal resources over a very short time frame.

Student and client feedback are used to assess the degree to which the Guerrilla Marketing Plan is innovative, impactful, and engaging. Results from 20 Guerrilla Marketing Plan assignments and 20 traditional marketing plan assignments are discussed and suggestions for implementing Guerrilla Marketing Plan assignments into marketing courses are proposed. Furthermore, I created a comprehensive rubric for assessing Guerrilla Marketing Plans to facilitate efficient assessment of student work. Overall, the Guerrilla Marketing Plan assignment helps close the loop between marketing education and marketing practice by engaging students in interactive situations with real companies and problems then creating focused marketing plans to effectively address the marketing challenges. (References are available upon request.)