

THE USE OF STUDENT PROJECTS TO TEACH MARKETING PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Requests for adding realism to the curriculum of the business college can be found in both the popular and academic literature; e.g., Business week, July 23, 1979 and November 10, 1980; Berdine and Hopkins (1979); and English and Lewison (1979). From the perspective of many marketing academicians, however the business world may be best served in the long run by providing the student with a solid theoretical background that prepares students to compare and contrast what business actually does in terms of its marketing practice to what it should be doing in order to optimize its use of scarce resources. Unfortunately, as Done (1979, p.5) so aptly points out: "The demand from the business world seems to be for graduates who can do something, more than for those who know something." Junior Achievement, applied management and internship programs are some of the suggested techniques for increasing the student's involvement with the business world (see English and Lewison, 1979, for elaboration of these programs). This paper suggests an additional technique that can be added to this list.

SENIOR PROJECTS

A senior project is one of the graduation requirements at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The senior project is a formal report of the results of a study or experiment usually directly related to the student's field of intended employment which is selected and completed under the supervision of a faculty member. The purpose of the senior project is, in part, to examine and discuss this issue of what business is doing and compare and contrast this information with what it should be doing. Senior projects encourage the development of independent analysis and provide the students the opportunity to apply principles learned in their course work. Requiring the student to complete the initial steps of the senior project within the framework of a business research course provides considerable assistance with the tasks of initiating the project and developing an understanding of the research approaches and methodology that will be required.

In order to provide a clear picture of the senior project and to demonstrate their potential effectiveness as both a pedagogical and a real-world tool two senior projects are reviewed. In the first of these projects the student developed and pretested a questionnaire dealing with customer satisfaction with a local department store. The questionnaire was mailed to one-thousand customers randomly selected from credit-card holder accounts. There were 349 usable responses. The student used the cross-tab program from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences to analyze the data. The senior project provided the student with some

insight and experience with buying practices through her work with the local store. The project also demonstrated how buyers (the student's intended field) could more directly measure customer satisfaction (ultimately, of course, measured by sales). The study disclosed the relative dissatisfaction of the 41-50 year age group with the department store's style, variety and selection of merchandise. In addition, the study indicated the customers were not particularly influenced by the store's advertising, window or in-store displays, suggesting the management of the store might want to re-examine its promotion programs.

In the second project the student examined the market potential of a local nursery plant rental business. The student developed, pretested and administered a questionnaire to a stratified sample of business in the area. Prior to sampling the population, the student had conducted a breakeven analysis in order to determine what level of market response would be necessary for the business to survive. Again, the data collected were analyzed using the cross-tab program from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. After extending the sample results to the total population, the student concluded there was not sufficient market potential.

CONCLUSION

The authors have suggested carefully organized and structured student projects can be used as both a pedagogical technique and a means for including real-world experiences in the business curriculum. For the business firms involved, the benefit of the senior projects briefly examined in this paper and other student projects is quite often valuable information which may lead to improved business performance. The benefits of the senior projects to the student are: (1) it provides an opportunity to develop some experience with the business world; (2) it helps to provide practical insights into marketing practices and decision making; and (3) it encourages the development of report-writing and skill--one of the problem areas typically cited by businessmen.

REFERENCES

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