

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO MARKETING COURSES VIA SAP ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING (ERP) SYSTEM

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The use of simulation games have been a popular means of teaching business and marketing content for numerous years. As more and more software is being utilized to conduct business, some of those companies have developed simulation games to help teach and train students and employees on how to utilize the software. SAP is one such company that has created an ERPsim simulation game to familiarize existing and future employees with SAP's enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. The simulation game consists of two components: (1) ERP processes and (2) ERPsim—a simulation program that automates and simulates business processes (SAP University Alliances, 2012). It is touted as an easy way to ease students into SAP's ERP system without having to fully understand the SAP ERP system.

The original motivation that started the project was to see how SAP could become part of the curriculum in a Marketing class or classes such that marketing courses could be identified as SAP certification classes. It was decided to introduce the game in a graduate and undergraduate retailing classes then extend it to the MBA Core marketing class. The simplest game ERPsim labeled as a "distribution" game is based on three different flavored bottled waters offered in two different sizes. It basically allows for three twenty-day months to be played over a period of time that the instructor can regulate. Instruction sheets are available to enable navigation of the SAP ERP software with little or no prior knowledge. The inclusion of ERPsim usage was particularly motivated by the need to expose students to technology and how even marketers need to utilize technology if they want to have instant access to business and market data that affect marketing tasks and the decisions related to those tasks.

Given technology is not always Marketing discipline friendly, there was a need to assess the utilization of the ERPsim in marketing and retailing classes. An assessment tool was designed to determine if integrating SAP ERP activities in marketing and retailing classes was justified and then if utilizing the simulation game had a positive impact on learning marketing activities. The assessment of the classes including ERPsim focused on the student's knowledge of SAP, the ability to implement and utilize technology to perform marketing tasks, and the ability to develop and implement a tactical marketing plan for a convenience/commodity good.

The post survey assessment indicated students were not sure what to expect when playing ERPsim; yet, were excited while playing the game. The majority of students had not been exposed to SAP; but did enjoy the experience and recommended ERPsim utilization in future retailing and marketing classes.

After playing ERPsim, the student's gained in their knowledge as well as navigation skills in SAP. However, most students indicated they were not comfortable or confident of their ability to navigate SAP based on ERPsim alone. The majority of the students felt ERPsim was a good way to learn and would recommend playing it again. What was interesting from this assessment was students indicated after playing the simulation, they thought it was harder to play than they thought before playing the simulation. Comments from the students indicated that playing the game was viewed as harder because they had to develop a plan, could not control the market, and thus the implementation of the plan to generate the simulation results according to their plan was more difficult than expected. In addition, there were several complaints about how difficult or non-user friendly the SAP system was which reinforced problems students encountered following the ERPsim task instructions sheets. Many students

blamed the non-user friendly interface, the difficult of executing the game activities, and the lack of disclosure on how to play the game as the reasons for failure to successfully reach their planned goals and objectives. Students found the game hard and did not like the way the game was played due to three factors: (1) the speed of the game, (2) the inability to see how the game related to marketing/retailing, and (3) the need to develop and defend a marketing/retailing plan.

Further even though the students had been exposed to a definition of marketing in numerous marketing classes, the students totally forget the full definition of marketing while playing the game because the ERPsim game designed by IS professionals, operationalized marketing as advertising only. Students do not see that having the right product, at the right price, in the right place, at the right time as marketing or retailing. Finally, students view ERPsim as a simulation game that should reflect the same user friendly front end presentation as the video games they play. Somewhere while playing the game, the game mode overrode the fact that ERPsim is based on SAP's ERP operating system. The presentation of ERPsim needs to emphasize it is an ERP system simulation that will not necessarily be user friendly as the system was built by IS professionals nor will it be easy to navigate ERP software given the complicated process of designing software over several years that integrate business function and actions.

Overall, the assessment of including SAP ERP via ERPsim in marketing classes was positive. The majority of the students enjoyed the experience and recommended ERPsim utilization in future retailing and marketing classes. However, via the assessment, it was clear it is still a work in progress. Trying to take a technology tool not designed for another business function and integrate that technology tool into another business function is not without issues. Only with time and implementation will creative ways to integrate technology into marketing courses occur as we prepare our students for the 21st century.

References Available upon Request