

A CONSUMER-PLANNING APPROACH TO TEACHING MARKETING
UNDER UNSTABLE CONDITIONS

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The consumer-planning approach to marketing education refers to a class project involving 1) the innovation of a new product for a target market, 2) determination of its market feasibility, and 3) preparation of a marketing plan for its introduction to the marketplace. All three functions have been found to be essential in presenting a comprehensive view of marketing, particularly to those students whose curriculum does not require more than one marketing course for graduation. The approach was developed by the author in 1969 and has since been applied at Western Washington University. Through several years of continuous experimentation, the approach was evolved from a survey of the marketing area, to develop research and planning capabilities of the students in the marketplace.

It is assumed that the university is allocating a lump sum of money (usually \$10,000) for innovation of a new product, its production, and marketing in the city. The class is divided into several teams (usually from 3-5 each) to serve as a Marketing Executive Group with the task of innovating a new product, determining its marketing feasibility, and formulating a marketing plan for its distribution. The instructor serves as a consultant to the executive group.

Each team develops a new product and analyzes the impact of environmental and resource constraints on its marketing functions. The next step is to design a market survey and to conduct face-to-face interviews with a sample of at least 240 consumers in the target market. The sample is drawn by applying random numbers to the billing files of the water department or other utility firms. All team members participate in the design of interview forms, conducting interviews and fieldwork supervision. Marketing data thus generated are processed by computer, and the printout provides raw material for analysis.

The next step is preparation of a marketing plan which involves formulation of functional strategies for introduction of the product into the market. Each team has to present a theoretical foundation and the marketing rationale for selection of the recommended strategies for product planning, purchasing, packaging, branding, distribution, transportation, warehousing, selling, advertising, sales promotion, pricing, consumer services, and market information. Functional strategies are presented in about two to three pages each, and elaborated on by the charts and statistical tables produced by the survey.

The business community, residents of the city and the university community were all extremely cooperative in implementation of the market surveys. Benefits derived included A) creation of a consumer-oriented attitude on the part of the business students, B) an awareness of the

fact that the realities of the marketplace can be at times different from executive preconceptions, C) learning marketing by doing marketing activities in the marketplace, D) attainment of the theoretical foundation and practical experience of a body of knowledge which is usually offered in four different marketing classes, E) development of a managerial attitude which enables the students to gain the cooperation of outside bodies for implementation of their projects, and F) enhancement of the student morale, which has extended to other courses taught in the College of Business and Economics

The effect of the unstable marketing conditions of 1979-1981, highlighted by soaring interest rates, consumer financing constraints, record inflation rates, and a "you-only-live-once" lifestyle, were also measured in the surveys. The application of the innovative approach revealed that in Northwest Washington, availability of reasonable credit terms has generally outweighed the quality and guarantees for durable goods as well as product design and price. The importance of consumer credit in buying decisions has so outranked other components of price that it seems plausible to separate the former from the latter and constitute it as an independent factor in marketing management strategies.

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NOTE: The eleven remaining references are available upon request from the author, Dr. Farrokh Safavi, Professor of Business Administration, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington 98225.