

EDUCATING THE GENERAL PUBLIC: THE EXTENDED ROLE OF MARKETING EDUCATORS

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This paper is designed to provide a basis for the discussion of several issues concerning the role of marketing educators in our society. These issues focus on the role of marketing educators in educating the general public about marketing.

Consumerism is defined and the authors provide support for the contention that marketing activities are the focal point for many issues raised by consumerism. Consumer education as a way of alleviating some of the misunderstanding about marketing which leads to consumer discontent is also discussed. Additionally, studies suggesting how consumers should be educated are cited. Ultimately, this brings us to question whether marketing educators should take a role in educating the general public about marketing, and if so, what this role should be.

A questionnaire was sent to a number of marketing educators across the country to ascertain their opinions on whether they have a role in improving the public's general understanding of marketing. Of 60 questionnaires, thirty-one were returned.

The first question asked about involvement of their school's marketing faculty in activities to bridge the gap between academia and the business community. Nearly all respondents indicated involvement of this type and various opportunities to establish a relationship with marketing practitioners were identified.

The second question inquired about their faculty's involvement in activities to educate the general public about marketing. Over one-third of the respondents claimed no effort was being exerted by marketing faculty at their schools to contribute to the general public's understanding of marketing. About half of the respondents said their faculty give marketing presentations to civic organizations. A few indicated that they give speeches about marketing to political groups. Other activities marketing educators purported as ways they are increasing the general public's understanding of marketing were given.

In response to the third question about whether marketing educators should take a role in improving the general public's understanding of marketing, twenty-seven answered "yes." Two respondents were uncertain, one said "no" and there was one nonresponse. Several general and some specific suggestions for what the role should be were offered.

Comments from colleagues completing the questionnaire suggest that although they feel marketing educators should assume a role in educating the public, such concrete rewards as monetary compensation, promotion, and tenure are not given for those endeavors. This may be a major obstacle to meeting this end.

The authors conclude with a brief discussion of necessary considerations for developing a more cohesive effort in educating the general public about marketing.