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Don't Isolate E-Business from the Marketing Communication Curriculum

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Introduction

Electronic (E-)business conducted on the Internet has already exceeded $30 billion in 2001 involving consumers and ten times more among business-to-business customers, and U.S. estimates are that spending will continue to increase through the first decade of the 21st Century. (Cyberatlas, 2002) With over 50 million people (60% of the U.S. population) with on-line access, this penetration rate far exceeds the growth of the last two new media in the U.S., television and cable. (Arduini, 2000) These people spend over eight hours per month online doing everything from shopping and chatting long distance with friends or strangers to finding outlets for charitable donations and engaging in unique forms of entertainment. (Cyberatlas, 2002) Internet users now have over 10 million sites to choose from, but the most popular sites, eBay and Amazon, focus on commerce. These factors have corporations in every industry scrambling to find employees capable of developing strategies and tactics to acquire a slice of this huge and ever growing business.

Higher education has responded in a number of ways, creating everything from degree programs and areas of specialization in e-commerce to offering electives that focus on specific aspects of e-business such as setting up a "dot com" company or designing Web pages. The biggest impact on the higher education curriculum has occurred in schools of business and computer science, where corporations have tended to look first for sources of Internet savvy graduates. Admittedly, the fields of marketing and computer science face the greatest changes in how normal business in their industries is conducted. Marketers must address entirely new conceptualizations of supply chain management, pricing and profit level strategies, market dynamics and organizational structure, not to mention changes in consumer behavior and approaches to buying. (Humboldt, 2000) Computer science focus has shifted from systems and network maintenance that primarily involved internal operations of a firm to creating Web pages that are the most visible link with key audiences outside the company.

However, there are at least four changes introduced by e-business and the Internet that have important implications for curricula throughout the campus, particularly in the field of communication. The Internet has forced a re-conceptualization of: 1) how people shop; 2) how they acquire information; 3) how they interact with one another; and 4) how they entertain, which are vastly different from how they did these things before the Internet. Without addressing these issues with students studying communication, programs will poorly prepare people to deliver information in the 21st Century.

The shopping experience is revolutionarily different over the Internet. Shoppers can no longer touch the product, examine the package, know who sold it to them or who to complain to if they are dissatisfied with the product nor make a purchase with complete confidence that their financial transaction was securely executed. All these missing pieces change the criteria consumers use to make purchases and change the type of information they need in advance to persuade them to take the act ultimately desired by the seller. How they use the Internet experience with a product to modify their behavior at the traditional retail outlet is another re-conceptualization that marketing communicators must understand.

How people acquire information has changed dramatically. Information crucial to make purchasing decisions is now easier to access than ever. Take shopping for an automobile as an example. Twenty years ago all the information was in the hands of car dealers. Then *Consumer Reports* and other publications began revealing dealer markups on every make and model. But you still needed to visit a local library to review these sources, then visit a dealership to negotiate the final price. Today, all this can be accomplished on the Internet in a matter of an hour.

At the same time, consumers must be more critical of Internet information because of the inherent biases of these sources and the lack of an objective "gatekeeper" to screen out such biases. Consumers have already exercised a heightened "gatekeeper" role as evidenced by the failure of most Internet banner advertising to date. (Hwang, 2000) Instead, the concept of "permission marketing" has emerged as a new way to approach consumers with product information that they select. (Godin, 1999)

Audiences are no longer at the mercy of timelines set by the news media to distribute information. Updated information can be accessed 24-7 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) on anything—-news (local, national or international), weather, financial, sports. Audiences can access the information they need when they want it. This reverses the power of control long held by information distributors, which requires a better understanding of audiences and how they want this information packaged.

The Internet has introduced new ways for people to interact with businesses, strangers, even each other. Instead of drawing conclusions about a business from its location, the appearance of the facility, and the people they encounter, an Internet visitor uses "social associations" (Dominick, 1999) by assessing the business based on what links it has on its site, how easy it is to navigate to obtain the desired information and how unobtrusive the requests are for personal information.

Bulletin boards, chat rooms, personal websites and email have changed the way people interact with other people. The faceless, nameless anonymity offered by Internet communication has crumbled barriers of communication for people otherwise hampered by the inability to articulate thoughts and feelings. Internet communication tends to be more open and personal regardless of who is the intended source—stranger or friend. Theories of interpersonal communication need reconsideration given this new communication environment.

People entertain differently using the Internet. Entertainment can be sought on an individual's own timeline, not a television network's or movie theater manager's schedule. Content demands have changed as well, with live heart surgery, and the colon surgery of NBC news anchorwoman Katie Couric drawing huge audiences. These changes require new approaches to studying programming and entertainment, not to

mention implications from legal and ethical perspectives since the Internet has no geographic, cultural, age or sometimes even tasteful limits. All forms of communication are impacted by the ever-growing role of the Internet in our lives, although the changes appear "more evolutionary than revolutionary." (Varadarajan, 2000)

Educational Literature

The educational planning process is typically divided into four elements: determination of desired outcomes, development of curriculum to deliver those outcomes, use of pedagogy to provide instruction for the curriculum and assessment of learning (Coombs and Rybacki, 1999). Marketing communication programs seem to have already determined the desired set of outcomes related to Internet education, which include understanding the strategic (e.g., planning, research) and tactical uses (e.g., graphic design, writing) of the Internet for marketing purposes. At present, most programs are immersed in elements two and three: developing curricula and pedagogy to produce learned outcomes. But the approach to this planned curriculum is far from unanimous.

According to Daugherty and Reece (2002), in 1993-94 nine percent of advertising and public relations programs had integrated Internet discussion into existing courses while four percent offered separate Internet courses. This ratio of integrated to isolated course offerings continued until 1997, when the percentage of programs offering isolated Internet courses passed the number integrating such discussion. At present, about 65 percent of advertising programs and 57 percent of PR programs have adopted stand-alone courses, with marketing programs falling in between at 62 percent. Overall, 91 percent of advertising programs, 77 percent of PR programs and 79 percent of marketing programs have integrated Internet discussion into their curricula in one way or another. However, when asked what percentage of overall class time is devoted to Internet discussion when integrated into existing courses, 80 percent dedicated 20 percent or less.

Other efforts to integrate coursework in marketing communication curricula have met with limited success long before the Internet came along. Surveys of advertising and public relations educators concerning their attitudes and experiences with developing integrated marketing communication (IMC) programs during the 1990s shows widespread isolation of courses in advertising separate from public relations. (Pasadeos, 2000) In addition, advertising and public relations majors remain separate at many institutions, faculty research focuses on one area or the other and cites research from different sets of sources, and reading by faculty remains distinct, with 86 percent of PR faculty not reading advertising publications and 92 percent of advertising faculty ignoring PR publications.

Contemporary instructional models make the argument that stand alone courses do not encourage students to transfer skills and learning into their respective disciplines. (Wunsch and Tomkovick, 1995) These models support a curricular plan where at most one basic course is needed on Internet principles as they apply to communication. After that all remaining required courses need to address the implications of the Internet to the specific subject addressed. For example, an advertising copywriting course would need to address how writing for the Internet must be different than for other media. A broadcast production course would need to cover how video streaming

and MP3 technology can be used to deliver programming over the Internet.

Even authors of research on computer-mediated (Blackboard, Internet) instruction show it's ineffective to teach technology separate from the courses using computer mediated resources (Witmer, 1998). Findings show instruction will bog down in technical details and lose learning impact. Applying this philosophy to teaching about the Internet once again argues for integrating discussions of the Internet when theoretical concepts are addressed so students can make the connections between them.

Curricular Implications

Broadcasting

Because the Internet has introduced a new way for audiences to be entertained and informed (on their own time schedule, controlling the desired depth or lack of coverage of a topic, etc.), many broadcasting courses must address new ways to approach program content, scheduling and promotion. The biggest impact on broadcasters may not be how to change programming on their traditional delivery systems, but how to extend the product onto the Web in interesting and attractive ways. Two examples of applying the "brand extension" concept of marketing to broadcasters using the Internet are SyncTV, which supplements network coverage of sports with updated statistics on demand and live chat sessions with analysts, and EnhancedTV, which allows viewers to play along with contestants on televised game shows like "Who Wants to be a Millionaire." None of these implications warrant a 16-week course on the subject. Instead, these topics must be woven into every broadcast course dealing with programming and promotion.

Speech Communication

Speech communication programs that often feature courses in interpersonal and small group (even family) communication need to address the sociological changes in human interactions introduced by the Internet.   In some instances, the faceless, anonymous nature of the Internet has allowed people to broaden their communication skills, while in others, the addictive nature of the Internet (six percent in one study (Donn, 1999)) has closed communication channels among family and friends. One researcher found the self-presentation tactic called "social association" exhibited by Internet users through links placed on personal Web pages and through dialogue in chat rooms and discussion groups. (Dominick, 1999) People have new ways to present themselves.

Advertising

A majority of academic programs in advertising across the country are housed in schools of communication rather than business, and some experts believe they belong there (Marker, 1999), making the impact of e-business on higher education broader than in only business and computer science programs. With Internet advertising revenue already exceeding $6 billion annually and projected to top $33 billion by 2004 (Cyberatlas, 2002), any contemporary advertising curriculum must address the Internet.

At the very basic level, an advertising principles class must address the Internet as a

viable media alternative to television, magazines or direct mail. Although calculated differently, the need exists for fundamental information on reach and frequency delivery on the Internet to assess it as part of a comprehensive media plan.

But the Internet's effects on advertising reach far beyond a media issue. According to Kevin Roberts, CEO, Saatchi and Saatchi, PLC, advertising agency, the Internet must change from a supplier of information to a developer of relationships. He says great brands have mystery and sensuality. The Internet must provide these things. "Think of 'e' not as electronic, but emotion," says Roberts. (Hwang, 2000) This suggests that advertising copywriting continue to teach the same principles on how to create effective brand advertising, but adjust the focus to how emotion and brand character can be transmitted via Internet messages.

Any communication research course must address a range of issues raised by the Internet. Students need to learn search strategies to navigate the morass of information available on any single subject. Database development using the Internet introduces the need for knowledge on strategies to acquire information and how to do it in an ethical manner. (Blackshaw, 2000) And using the Internet as a research tool to conduct surveys, experiments, collect panel data and more requires a careful analysis of the strengths and limitations of each technique compared to its non-Internet counterparts. (DeLorme, 2000; Wimmer and Dominick, 2000).

Media planning and campaigns classes cannot ignore the Internet for its variety of options: banner ads, email, sponsorships and interstitials. Ad design courses must address the importance of look and feel for a successful Web page. Again, there is no course in this curriculum unaffected by the Internet, which argues for integrating such discussion rather than isolating it to maximize the connections students make between the Internet and advertising in general.

Public Relations

Chapter two in a widely cited book, Public Relations on the Net (Holtz, 1999), is entitled, "How communication has been changed forever." The chapter goes on to compare the industrial economy of the past to the information economy brought on by the Internet based on four characteristics: top-down v. networked communication structure; quantity v. quality communication; batch-processed v. customized messages and producer-driven v. customer-driven communication needs. The two economies clearly reflect substantial differences in communication strategy, but it's more likely that computers and cable television ushered in the information economy in the 1970s, not the Internet in the 1990s.

Hence, public relations has already adopted many of these changes. It just happens to have a new outlet to distribute this information, and that is what must be integrated into all courses in a PR curriculum. Like advertising, public relations messages must be written with consideration for the unique circumstances Internet users bring to this medium. Lessons need to teach writing in "chunks" or small, concise blocks, provide context anticipating the myriad of links that may have brought different readers to the same material, and other writing approaches unique to the Internet. Receiver-driven communication (Holtz, 1999) provided when the audience member wants it (e.g., 24-hour response to a complaint filed over the Internet) rather than the "shotgun method" aren't new strategic approaches, just more intensive ones.

Press releases written just like those distributed by mail or fax will not work the same way over the Internet. Reporters now expect visuals to accompany all text, links to easily access additional background information and other conveniences to make their job of building news inventory easier.

The Internet's global reach allows public relations practitioners to bypass traditional media outlets to distribute information direct to key "publics" without the role of the media gatekeepers. This opportunity requires the learning of new communication strategies and theories to replace old ones made obsolete by the Internet such as agenda setting theory. Activism and crisis communication strategies change when public relations officers no longer must rely on media assistance to distribute a message. Ethical and legal issues accompany the relative freedom of having one's own international medium to distribute information.

Fundraising via the Internet requires a new strategic approach that must be addressed by a public relations curriculum. The same techniques that worked through direct mail or telephone solicitations in the past don't meet the demands of Web donors. And Web donors are not to be ignored, with over eight percent of weekly Internet users making donations that average two-to-three times more than the average offline donation. (Spethmann, 2000)

Customer relationship email, corporate e-newsletters, reminder services, order confirmations, customer complaint sites, permission list marketing, co-op marketing and event follow-up are tactics commonly used by public relations personnel that have changed when done over the Internet. (Kaydo, 2000) As these standard tactics are addressed in any public relations course, the implications introduced by the Internet must be integrated into the discussion.

Marketing

Clearly, the curricula with the biggest adjustments to make in the Internet era are in the business schools. The marketing mix must be revisited for e-business, with price and promotion playing different roles, place or warehousing and distribution facing a total revamping, not to mention changes in consumer behavior and approaches to buying. A new component to the mix, customer experience, plays an expanded role in the business structure of the Internet. "Customer experience is key. Place and price are less relevant with Internet shopping. Quality of customer service, on-time delivery, product performance, shipping and handling, privacy policies" are what bring people back and make them lasting customers. (Couture, 2000)

However, success on the Internet still relies on fundamental principles of good marketing. Understanding customers, data mining, delivering what consumers need simply and conveniently and at a reasonable price are still essential to marketing success on the Internet or elsewhere. Every course covering these topics needs to be adjusted to accommodate implications of the Internet. For example, the marketing research course needs to address the strengths and limitations of using the Internet as a data collection channel. Consumer behavior courses must address theories that account for how consumers can be influenced when the only window to experience a company is limited to a computer screen instead of a retail outlet with sales reps, controlled ambiance, point-of-purchase displays and the like. Only selective new courses that focus on Internet intricacies such as permission marketing or Internet supply chain

management are needed to deliver the necessary background graduates in these two areas need to excel in e-business.

Journalism

The biggest issue facing journalism and the Internet is how to package news. Every news medium has a website, and several (NBC-TV, ESPN, USA Today) are among the most popular sites. (Cyberatlas, 2002) Media sites generally offer extended coverage (both verbally and visually) beyond what is found in their traditional outlets, and instant updates, which changes journalism from an industry with established deadlines to running deadlines 24-7. These and other characteristics (e.g., streaming video) of the Internet require new approaches by would-be writers, who must approach story ideas differently, write differently and know enough about technology to transmit usable information instantaneously.

The lines between print journalism, broadcast journalism and photojournalism are disappearing, with a single reporter responsible for copy, visuals and a continuous stream of updated reporting more typical of broadcasting media coverage. Reporting and editing classes must simply add modules on writing for the Internet while photography classes must include instruction on digital cameras and uploading visual files. The September 11th tragedy required a new way of delivering breaking news in a concise, stripped down, but constantly updated Web version to accommodate unprecedented traffic levels. (Seib, 2001) But the fundamentals of defining news and presenting it in an accurate, interesting and organized way still apply in the world of the Web.

Communication law

Communication law courses must confront how to approach the regulation of Internet communication. Is it broadcasting, cable, telephone, journalism or commercial speech? Each field has unique legal foundations that drive regulatory policy and most, if not all of these areas are already covered in a traditional communication course, making the integration of Internet discussions easy.

Conclusion

There is no question the Internet and e-business has made a monumental impact on the world. Customers' relationships with companies remind one of the days of consumer interactions with the general store, the blacksmith and the local undertaker. And, herein lies the key to curricular approaches to the Internet. The Internet has allowed society to evolve back to a day when relationships made a difference, when the individual had greater control over what they wanted to experience and what they wanted to avoid. The concepts are as old as paper and pencil. Marketing communication curricula must continue to teach the same principles, but wrap them around an Internet context.

The "isolation" approach does come with several advantages. Isolated courses on Internet Page Design are easier to market both to existing students and to potential students and parents who can see these course listings in an academic bulletin. Isolated courses taught by just a few instructors also means less institutional investment in bringing select faculty up to "state of the art" levels. Attendance at workshops, seminars and conferences hosted by groups such as American Ad Federation and Public

Relations Society of America chapters, the Internet Ad Bureau. The National Association of Broadcasters and other trade groups, not to mention subscriptions to Internet publications, library resources and tech support can be costly to support for many institutions.

But the tradeoff must consider what's best for the students. With a few exceptions, such as stand alone courses on non-profits and the Internet, social implications of the Internet and Web page presentation, successful academic programs must integrate, not isolate. The outcomes will include better educated students and a more educated and stimulated faculty enlivened by the excitement that has accompanied this new technology's penetration into our daily lives.

Once these curricular matters are settled, educators can concentrate on element four of the educational planning process, assessment of outcomes. Assessment of conceptual learning can come in the form of assignments and exam questions that tie basic concepts of marketing communication to the Internet, such as papers assessing websites and their strategies and tactics, comparisons of on-line versus traditional message formats such as advertisements, annual reports and news stories. Skill assessments can be done by requiring class chat room discussions and on-line assignments to evaluate Internet information search skills and comfort levels of interacting with the Internet (Coombs and Rybacki, 1999), or assigning banner ads and other on-line writing exercises to assess adaptability to the new technology.

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