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Innovating the Marketing Curriculum: Establishing an Academic Major In Internet Marketing

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Abstract - The explosion of digital marketing technologies and business practices presents numerous opportunities and challenges to marketing programs worldwide. In addition to the rapid growth in online marketing practices, AACSB accreditation standards stress the importance of “current technologies in business and management contexts” in their 2013 Learning and Teaching standards (AACSB 2013). As business faculty have integrated knowledge about digital technologies and hands-on digital training into their marketing courses, some schools have decided that the time is right to offer academic programs in digital marketing.

This paper provides insights into developing and establishing an academic major in Internet Marketing at the undergraduate level. Five critical issues are identified that provide data about the current status of the major and potential challenges to be faced by those considering development of a major, minor or certificate in Internet Marketing. Curriculum development, including specific topics and courses, will be identified and discussed.

Keywords: Internet marketing, curriculum development, marketing major

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners – This paper provides insights into establishing an internet marketing major at the undergraduate level. Five critical issues, information about curricula, and the experiences of the author and others are provided to inform and guide those considering such a major.

Introduction

It is difficult to quarrel with the overwhelming importance of the Internet as a marketing communication engine: Over two-thirds of U.S. households now use the Internet at home (U.S. Census 2010), an estimated \$37 billion was spent on online advertising in 2012 (Emarketer 2012), and Facebook reportedly reaches over 1.19 billion monthly active users worldwide (Facebook 2014).

The explosion of new digital technologies and practices is also revolutionizing teaching and learning and there is probably no academic discipline more affected by the emergence of Internet technology than the field of marketing. Imagine trying to teach a course in advertising, retail, logistics or direct marketing without discussing the application of the Internet to the discipline. Nevertheless, the development of Internet Marketing as an academic discipline has been slow to evolve. According to Marketing Edge (formerly the Direct Marketing Educational Foundation), (2013) the vast majority of students who study interactive marketing pursue a degree in marketing. Nevertheless, a growing number of internet-based marketing programs are listed on their website. According to information provided on the Marketing Edge (2013) website, at least 19 universities offer a concentration, certificate, specialty, option or major in an Internet Marketing-related program, up from a reported 5 undergraduate programs in 2008 (Wymbs 2011). While many universities now offer a course in Internet Marketing or related topics, the development of a major in the subject has been slow and complicated by a number of issues.

The purpose of this paper is provide insights into five issues and challenges for universities seeking to expand their interactive marketing offerings or develop a major or minor in Internet/Interactive Marketing. Several different approaches to curriculum development that may be of interest to professors and administrators charged with curriculum development of an interactive marketing major will be presented. Note that while the study of interactive marketing can be found in several academic departments, this paper will analyze the issues from the standpoint of a marketing curriculum within a business school. Our specific experience and decisions in the Haworth College of Business at Western Michigan University (WMU) will also be discussed.

Issue 1: Establishing the Need for the Major

One of the first issues to consider is the need for a major, as opposed to the integration of Internet marketing and e-commerce technology courses within existing courses and majors. Alternatively, some schools may wish to create a minor, specialization or certificate program in Internet Marketing. While each of those options has merits, we determined that the major was the option we would choose for a number of important reasons.

First, university stakeholders including students, employers, and advisory boards communicated overwhelming interest in and support for the creation of the major. Second, our university had been exploring and promoting the expansion of interdisciplinary curricula across the university for a number of years and there were

successful precedents already operating in the business college. Next, we determined that the field of internet marketing and digital technologies was so vast and growing so rapidly that we needed a major to provide a robust set of courses that would prepare students for employment opportunities at graduation.

Finally, we determined that both marketing and information systems faculty in the Haworth College of Business were trained, available and interested in teaching in the major and the approach represented the best use of current resources. We continue to believe that Internet Marketing is a curricular marriage between marketing principles and digital technologies and that for our school the major was the best choice among the curricular possibilities mentioned earlier.

When we set out to determine the numbers and types of Internet Marketing programs available in the United States, it became clear that such programs were few and far between. The marketing major at most schools probably includes a required or elective course in Internet Marketing and perhaps an elective on topics such as Data Mining, Social Media or E-Commerce Law. An enterprising student interested in the interactive marketing field could take one or more of these courses and seek eventual employment in the field. Until recently, this was the path that many of our students took, as they informed faculty after landing jobs in the field. Employment opportunities in interactive marketing have been one of the few bright spots in a slow economy, but more and greater skills have become necessary as the field has matured. Thus, WMU determined that there was sufficient interest in the major and abundant employment opportunities available to expand from the single Internet Marketing course offered for more than a decade to a full-fledged, inter-disciplinary major in E-Business Marketing.

Getting buy-in for implementation of a new major requires forecasting of demand. Because of the small number and young age of existing programs, it is difficult to predict how many students will choose to specialize in the field. The small but growing number of interactive programs suggests that we are in the early stages of development of and demand for the major. Based on the 100-150 students who sign up for the Internet Marketing elective each year at Western Michigan University, we believe there is significant demand for a major. A review of national data from Marketing Edge (2013) suggests that a number of schools offer concentrations, minors, specializations or certificates in internet marketing-related programs. Exhibit 1 summarizes the school data found on Marketing Edge's website, although it should not be considered comprehensive since schools frequently add new programs.

Exhibit 1

Degree-Granting programs in Internet Marketing and E-Business

<i>School</i>	<i>Program</i>
California State - Fresno	Certificate in E-Business
Western Connecticut State	Interactive Marketing option
Delaware State	Concentration in E-Commerce
Columbia College (Illinois)	E-Commerce minor
DePaul (Illinois)	Interactive Marketing certificate
Northern Illinois	Major in Interactive Marketing
Indiana Institute of Technology	MBA in E-Commerce
Ferris State (Michigan)	Concentration E-Commerce Marketing
Madonna (Michigan)	M.S. in E-Commerce
Walsh College (Michigan)	Specialization in E-Marketing
Western Michigan University	Major in E-Business Marketing
Rutgers (New Jersey)	BBA with E-Marketing specialization
Fashion Institute of Technology (New York)	Major in Direct & Interactive Marketing
SUNY-Old Westbury	Concentration in E-Commerce
Methodist College (North Carolina)	Concentration in E-Business
Akron (Ohio)	Direct/Interactive Marketing Minor (undergrad); MBA
Southern Oregon	Certificate in Interactive Marketing & E-Commerce
Scranton (Pennsylvania)	Minor in Electronic Commerce
Wisconsin-Whitewater	Direct/Interactive Marketing emphasis

Source: Marketing Edge, formerly Direct Marketing Educational Foundation (2013)

Issue 2: What should we call the major and in what academic discipline does the major reside?

Development of a major requires a descriptive name that suits the curriculum and is readily identifiable to students and employers. The following terms, which are by no means synonymous, represent some of the most popular course and program names: e-business, e-commerce, digital marketing, interactive marketing, digital advertising, and social media marketing, to name a few.

Such a major likely resides in a business college, but it could also be part of an information systems program, a communication program, or an advertising program. In the case of my university, we have decided to create an inter-disciplinary major that resides in both the marketing and information systems departments of our business college. Students take courses in both disciplines, but declare either a marketing track or an information systems track within the E-Business Marketing major. Thus students would graduate with a BBA degree from either the Marketing Department or the Business Information Systems Department, depending on the track selected.

We want our Marketing students to be able to develop Internet Marketing programs and specify technical requirements, even if they are not technically adept at implementing them. In the same way, we want to broaden the training our Information Systems students receive beyond technical development and implementation. As we continue to develop the curriculum, we may integrate courses from other programs

on campus, such as communication or CIS, as they become available and add value to our current offerings.

Issue 3: Curriculum Design

The study of Internet Marketing began in earnest in the late 1990s during a period of tremendous growth and hype that preceded the dot com crash of 2000-2001. During that time period, Mitchell and Strauss (2001) surveyed practitioners and academics for their opinions about curriculum requirements for the emerging field of study. The survey resulted in a list of the most important curricular items for Internet Marketing and E-Commerce programs. The list, which can be found in Exhibit 2, reveals great emphasis on technical topics such as information architecture and database design, which is not surprising considering that many of the respondents had experience or education in computer science and/or information technology. Because the data were collected over a decade ago, it is also understandable that topics such as “Search Engine Marketing” or “Social Media Marketing” were not included in their curricular wish lists.

Zahay, Scovotti, Peterson and Domogalski (2010) identified and assessed specific competencies for “Direct and Interactive Marketing” programs and their students by examining skills cited in previous research and marketing textbooks. Their sources of direct marketing expertise included topics such as customer relationship management (CRM), databases, email, testing and other important skills for Internet marketers to develop.

More recently, Wymbs (2011) provided details about the establishment of a new Interactive Marketing major that he was developing at Baruch College of City University of New York. The author provided extensive background information about steps taken in curriculum development of the major. Wymbs chose the Association of the Computer Machinery/Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers-Information Technology (ACM/IEEE-IT) undergraduate curriculum model as a guide. He also evaluated the new curriculum using Wind’s (2008) seven strategies for increasing the rigor and relevance of marketing. The proposed curriculum for CUNY’s digital marketing major can be found in Exhibit 3.

My university has chosen to call the major “e-Business Marketing” (EBM), because it is an interdisciplinary major that combines the expertise of two departments: Marketing and Business Information Systems. We felt that an interdisciplinary approach provided a number of advantages including offering a broad-based curriculum that provided training in both the marketing and technical aspects of the field. In reviewing other programs in the state and surrounding areas we found that none were co-directed by two departments and that such an approach could provide a competitive advantage and help leverage resources. By combining faculty from two departments we found that we did not need to make additional hires, with the exception of an additional marketing professor with interactive knowledge and training. In addition, we needed to add only one course, a capstone course, to existing offerings to flesh out the 24-credit hour major. Exhibit 4 summarizes major courses for both the marketing and information systems tracks in e-Business Marketing at Western Michigan University.

Exhibit 2
Highest Scoring Curricular Items Proposed By Academic and Practitioner Respondents
Mitchell and Strauss (2001)

Web page design

Information architecture

Database design and transaction management

Programming page interactivity

Database marketing and relationship management

Hypertext writing and editing

Graphic design

Marketing strategy and site promotion

Team and project management

Audience identification and traffic evaluation

Server-side programming

Server-side management

Extranet management (e.g. supply-chain management)

Exhibit 3
Description of Courses
Digital Marketing Major at CUNY
Wymbs (2011)

Core courses

MKT 3600 Marketing Research
MKT 4123 Marketing Web Analytics and Intelligence
MKT 4555 Internet Marketing
MKT 5750 Marketing Strategy

Additional required course

MKT 3605 Consumer Behavior
or
MKT 4700 Business Marketing Management

Elective courses—Choose three courses from the following, two of which must be marketing (MKT) or international business (IBS) courses.

MKT 4151 Direct and Interactive Marketing
MKT 4557 Digital Advertising
MKT 4460 International Supply Chain Management
MKT 4966 Social Media Marketing and New Ventures
IBS 3000 Innovation, Technology, and the Global Enterprise
CIS 3444 e-Business Technologies
CIS 3630 Principles of Web Design
LAW 3108 Law and the Internet
LAW 3118 Law of Unfair Competition and Intellectual Property
MGT 4967 Technology, Innovation, and Design in Entrepreneurship

Exhibit 4
Inter-disciplinary e-Business Marketing Major
Western Michigan University

Core Courses
(5 Courses - 15 Credits)

CIS 2900: Web Applications for Business
CIS 3900: Business Web Architecture

MKTG 2500: Marketing Principles

MKTG 3710: Marketing Research
MKTG 3730: Internet Marketing

Information Systems Track
(4 Courses - 12 Credits)

Required Courses

CIS 2800: Internet Programming
CIS 4950: eBusiness Technologies

Two Electives

CIS 2640: Business Reporting and Analysis
CIS 2660: Networking and Data Communications
CIS 3600: Systems Analysis and Design
CIS 3620: Information Technology Project Management
CIS 3640: Business Analytics
CIS 4100: Internship
CIS 4600: Business Database Applications
CIS 4640: Business Data Mining
CIS 4900: Electronic Commerce Development
CIS 5550: Topics in CIS
MKTG 4500: Customer Relationship Management
MKTG 4791: Advanced Internet Marketing

Marketing Track
(4 Courses - 12 Credits)

Required Course

MKTG 4791: Advanced Internet Marketing

Three Electives (Limited to one CIS Course)

MKTG 3600: Professional Selling
MKTG 3740: Advertising and Promotion
MKTG 4750: International Marketing
MKTG 4770: Consumer Behavior
MKTG 4780: Special Topics in Marketing
MKTG 4790: Marketing Internship
CIS 2640: Business Reporting and Analysis
CIS 4500: Customer Relationship Management

Issue 4: Faculty Interest, Training and Qualifications

This may be one of the biggest obstacles to development of the Internet Marketing major. In the same way that viewing advertisements makes many people think they are experts on the subject, the ubiquity of the Internet in our daily lives has led some to believe it would be a fun and easy course to take or teach. More likely, many academics would be unlikely to volunteer in this arena unless they were recent graduates of doctoral programs that emphasized the topic or had direct professional experience in digital marketing technologies. This raises several questions: can universities hire new professors with sufficient experience to develop courses? Is this a tenure-track hire or would universities be more likely to make this a term or part-time appointment for practitioners with industry experience?

Undoubtedly, faculty will spend an inordinate amount of time educating themselves on evolving Internet Marketing topics and keeping their knowledge base up to date. Updating links to websites, YouTube videos and websites that illustrate topics must be accomplished every semester and sometimes more than once a semester. Academic conferences often provide insights into research about e-commerce and internet marketing in general, but they are insufficient sources of training for teaching. The author of this paper has found the Internet Retailer conferences (irce.internetretailer.com), which are typically held several times a year in major cities across the United States, provide a wealth of timely practitioner information, best practices and contacts. These conferences are attended by hundreds of interactive marketing experts at all levels who are often pleased to share their knowledge with professors.

Issue 5: Resource Investments

Developing the major will require greater technology investments than might be found in the average marketing classroom. At a minimum, the classroom must be equipped with Internet connections, a projector and speakers. If the instructor wants students to surf the Internet in class or do hands-on exercises, the classroom itself must have Wi-Fi capability. Reliance on real-time technology is inherent in teaching the subject and its reliability is always in question as networks go down and web sites undergo maintenance.

Elective courses may require investments in resources such as databases, in the case of data mining, and a Google AdWords budget, for example, in order to explore the topic of search engine marketing. Major investments in hardware, software and lab space would be required for classes related to Web site and application development. In the Haworth College of Business at WMU, Business Information Systems is a major, so much of the equipment, labs and instruction needed for software development and study is readily accessible to marketing students enrolled in the major.

Because of the rapid adoption of new forms of hardware and software, faculty and their schools must be prepared for considerable updating of course content each semester. Some enterprising faculty may make contact with software or hardware vendors who are willing to provide their products at low or no cost to schools for the

opportunity to usability test their products. Other faculty, particularly those who teach in schools where money and resources are scarce, may find that their university is not equipped with the technical infrastructure and resources needed to develop the major. Grant money may provide some resources for either the faculty member or school, but since the technology must be constantly maintained and upgraded, such investments must likely emanate from higher levels in the university.

One of the looming challenges facing internet marketing programs concerns the rapid development of mobile marketing technology and the incorporation of cell phone-based marketing into the classroom. During fall 2012, 70 of my marketing students were exposed to commercial mobile site development software called CliqLaunch, developed by a start-up company in Atlanta, Georgia. The company, called Site Minis, offered my students, along with students at Michigan State, Ball State, the University of Tennessee and several other universities, the software free of charge for classroom use. They also offered a webinar tutorial on its use and semester-long technical support for classroom assignments, which resulted in the development of 25 functional mobile websites developed for campus clubs and, in the case of nearly 10 students, a mobile website for family businesses. Such innovative introductions of new learning aren't always possible, but they can provide state-of-the-art training for students and a terrific learning opportunity for faculty.

Conclusion

The development of the interactive marketing major is an opportunity for marketing faculty to provide a timely and relevant major to an audience who has always had the Internet at its disposal. The creation of a technology-based marketing major composed of content that changes daily can be a daunting but manageable undertaking, as some of the issues and challenges discussed in this paper illustrate. It is hoped that some of the examples and illustrations provided will prove helpful to others seeking to establish an innovative major that can bridge disciplinary silos and challenge conventional marketing wisdom, as Wind (2008) aptly pointed out. The Internet has breathed new life into the marketing discipline and the development of a major, minor, certificate or concentration can only enhance marketing's contribution to business study, research and skill development.

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