Marketing: The Need to Communicate ‘How’

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Key Words
Marketing Education, Syllabus Development, Marketing Implementation, Marketing Planning

Possible Tracks
- Marketing Strategy & Management
- Marketing Orientation
- New Applications of Marketing

Abstract
Marketing educators devote much of their courses to explaining the rudiments of marketing; analysis, strategy and marketing mix programmes. There tends to be very little exploration with students of the practical operational and organisational hurdles that they will encounter after graduation when they become marketing practitioners. This paper first outlines the deficiency in both core course syllabi and mainstream textbooks in terms of addressing marketing implementation. The solutions and processes for tackling implementation impediments, briefly overviewed, are now well known. Despite student and employer desires, they tend not to feature in most core marketing courses. This paper argues that marketing educators should provide their students with more of the ‘how to’ toolkit in order for them to better address implementation issues.

Biographical Note
Marketing: The Need to Communicate ‘How’

There is growing evidence that suggests marketing educators should devote greater attention to explaining ‘how’ marketing activities should be progressed within an organisation, rather than simply outlining to their students ‘what’ constitutes marketing and ‘why’ marketing per se matters. The ‘hows’ in fact are better comprehended than the majority of core course syllabi and textbooks imply. This paper explains why the facilitation of implementation must be given greater attention by marketing academics, then outlines the types of material that should be discussed with students, before concluding with a clear ‘call to action’ recommendation.

In a recent keynote paper addressing marketing knowledge, John Rossiter argues that marketers are not good at translating their ideas into practitioner-orientated processes (cf: also Day and Montgomery, 1999; Deshpande, 2001; Lehmann, 1996 and the AMA, 1998). Rossiter (2001) points out that numerous practitioner-oriented workbooks examine applied implementation issues, but for some reason marketing educators have traditionally ignored such notions. There is no doubt that there are numerous practitioner-oriented workbooks in the bookshops (eg: Dibb and Simkin, 1996; McDonald, 1999; Piercy, 1997). A challenge for marketing educators is to incorporate such applied frameworks within their core undergraduate and MBA courses. To the authors of the textbooks utilised as the mainstay for these business school students, there is a growing requirement to incorporate these practical insights and describe the day-to-day operational issues faced by marketers and business school students following their graduation.

Meeting Customer Needs?

A recent marketing planning exercise undertaken by one of the UK’s top business schools included a survey of 1,200 students that examined their expectations from business school education. The findings, emphasised in the sentiments expressed in a series of confirmatory focus groups, revealed an overwhelming desire amongst undergraduate and MBA students to examine in greater detail (a) the application in practice of the core marketing course concepts, (b) the practicalities encountered by practitioners deploying such frameworks, and (c) the requisites to effective implementation of such models. A review of the marketing courses taken by these students revealed that the discussion, in lectures or recommended textbooks, of implementation in practice and of the problems faced by managers was far from the norm. Some organisational behaviour and operations management courses included relevant coverage of these operational concerns, but most students failed to make the necessary links with their marketing courses.

This picture is replicated across the UK, as revealed by this particular school’s analysis of rival institutions’ courses and in recent unpublished surveys undertaken by two leading publishers. Only a minority of courses - less than 5% - in a minority of business schools featured implementation planning, processes and procedures. This is in sharp contrast to the expressed wishes of the surveyed students and also their prospective employers. A poll of leading industrialists and services businesses revealed that employers increasingly expect graduates – undergraduate and MBA – to have a grasp of the core concepts of business from the textbook perspective, but also in terms of how to
facilitate their deployment within an organisation, overcoming the probable operational, resource, cultural and organisational hurdles within a business setting.

The basics of consumer behaviour, the marketing environment, understanding competitors, marketing research, segmentation, targeting and positioning, and of course the ingredients of the marketing mix are the mainstays of current marketing core courses (Dibb and Simkin, 2002). A minority of these courses include sessions addressing marketing planning or the role of ethics and social responsibility. A handful include mention of more topical issues, such as customer relationship management, relationship marketing, one-to-one and value-based marketing. These few courses tend to be in departments where the faculty responsible for promoting these concepts in the journals and textbooks are based (Piercy, 2001).

But what of implementation? The barriers popularised by Dibb (1997), McDonald (1992ab, 1995), Piercy (1992, 1997) and Simkin (1996ab, 2000) are not featured in the lecture theatre. The applied processes for undertaking marketing planning, strategizing or implementation (cf: Dibb and Simkin, 1996, 1997a, 2002; Dibb et al, 1998; McDonald, 1999; McDonald and Dunbar, 1995; Piercy, 1997, 1999; Simkin, 2000) are not explained to students. The solutions to operational and organisational impediments (cf: Dibb and Simkin, 2002; Simkin, 2000) are not part of a typical marketing syllabus. If we as marketing educators devote hours of tuition to expounding the rudiments of marketing analysis and marketing strategy, yet imply to our students that implementation is addressed by virtue of coverage of the marketing mix and possibly a quick summary of the marketing planning process, we are failing to equip our students with the ‘how to do it’ toolkit so essential if marketing recommendations are to be actioned in the workplace. There is an associated danger that the ‘so what does marketing do?’ accusation - commonly directed to marketing practitioners by senior management and colleagues in other business functions - cannot be fully addressed by the marketing executives, brand managers and even marketing directors we have educated.

Table 1: Leading Textbook Coverage of Implementation Barriers and Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading UK core course texts listed by sales:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dibb et al (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobber (2001):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the common barriers and use of internal marketing. 7 pages on actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotler et al (2001):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One page covers relevant actions. Implementation warrants just a few paragraphs in all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brassington &amp; Pettitt (1999):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No coverage whatsoever of implementation. Very brief mention of developing programmes under Marketing Planning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not only are these implementation issues inadequately explained to students – and future marketers – there is a danger that they are not properly comprehended by many marketing educators. To compound the problem, the leading textbooks devote little or
no coverage to this topic: what is cited tends to be rather historical in perspective, often based on the work of Malcolm McDonald at the end of the 1980s (McDonald, 1992ab). In fact, more recent survey based research of practitioners’ implementation difficulties (Dibb and Simkin, 1997b; Simkin, 2000) reveals that marketing is now accepted and widely practised: thereby the impediments have become more operational and resource based compared with the poor comprehension of marketing, its process and remit as described a decade ago (eg: Greenley, 1992; Giles, 1989 and 1991; McDonald, 1992ab; Piercy and Morgan, 1994). Table 2 summarises the impediments now hindering effective implementation of marketing recommendations in the UK industrial and service sectors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers Hindering Marketing Planning Implementation</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Manufacturing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate communications</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonising difficulties across sites/countries</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing environment forces</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate information</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers lacking business skills</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management’s failure to see whole picture</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of customers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual manager’s empire building</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monopoly market position/forces</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-down approach to planning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to conduct planning activities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor involvement of functions/teams</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current apparent business success/arrogance</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of enthusiasm amongst non-marketers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff – lack of and turnover</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to change</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These issues are statistically unlikely to have occurred by chance @ 0.05 statistical significance. This particular in-depth study (Simkin, 2000) examined the practices of large manufacturing and services businesses in the West Midlands of the UK, building on the author’s earlier examination of marketing in the UK Times 1000 companies (Dibb and Simkin, 1997b). Column i indicates which impediments are currently cited by senior and line managers. Columns ii and iii indicate which issues were particularly [+++] prevalent or unimportant [---] in either services or manufacturing, and thereby any statistically significant variations between the two commercial sectors.

**Table 2: The Current Leading Impediments to the Implementation of Marketing Recommendations in UK Industry**

There is, therefore, a requirement for marketing educators to catch up with the current debate about implementation barriers. The remedies are well described in the journals and more practitioner-oriented texts (cf: Cravens, 1998; Dibb et al, 1998; Jain, 2000; McDonald, 1999; Piercy, 1998, 1999, 2000; Simkin, 2000). Unfortunately, the issues and solutions described in Figures 2 and 3 and in Table 3 do not appear in the bulk of core marketing course syllabi or textbooks. With fewer students taking specialist electives in marketing management - which may explore these operational aspects of marketing - there are growing numbers of graduates not exposed to these operational impediments and remedies.
Communications
Within Marketing?
Across Functions?
Through Hierarchies?
Mechanisms?
Channels?
Support?

Additional Resources
Intelligence/Information?
People?
IT/Communications?
Time?

Time Frames & Formats
How Long?
When?
Action-Learning or Externally Supported?
Hands-On/Hands-Off?
Communications?

Operational Considerations
Disruption by Planning?
Non-Marketers/Directors?
Buy-In from Functions?
Accessibility of Personnel/Information?
Communication of Plan?

Participants’ Expectations
What Expectations?
Working Priorities?
Worries/Concerns?
‘Political’ Cliques?
Office Politics?

Figure 1: Infrastructure Requisites for Effective Marketing Planning and Strategizing

The lack of understanding amongst practitioners of the barriers impeding implementation (eg: Table 2 and Figure 1) is a serious deficiency that impacts on marketing performance (Cravens, 1998; Piercy, 1997; Rossiter, 2001; Simkin, 2000). The lack of the utilisation of the processes and remedial actions outlined in Figure 2 and Table 3 (Simkin, 2000) hinders practitioners’ effective deployment of the marketing toolkit and philosophy (cf: McDonald, 1999; Piercy, 2000). In many ways, the problem is exacerbated by the textbooks and in the syllabus coverage at leading business schools. Surely, if so much course effort and textbook coverage are devoted to conveying the importance of marketing analyses, strategy and marketing mix
programmes, it makes sense to also properly explain how to link these themes and ensure effective implementation of marketing programmes? This would reflect the desires of our ‘customers’: students and their future employers.

**Table 3: Marketing Implementation Controls**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audits</th>
<th>Audits of the business’s track record for tackling marketing initiatives, available marketing intelligence, people skills, marketing expertise and ease of internal communication.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specifications</td>
<td>Detailed specification of the marketing task; personnel involvement, reporting procedures, leadership schedules and resources allocated; plus external support and roll-out requirements for the resulting marketing strategy or plan recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation and internal communication</td>
<td>Set-up orientation sessions for participating line managers and their seniors, skill training, progress reviews and debriefs for final recommendations with internal marketing and communication of their requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorisation</td>
<td>Task authorisations and senior ‘sign-off’ for team selection, budgets, access to information and key personnel, time, the overall process and expected deliverables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews and remedial action</td>
<td>On going reviews with progress meetings, senior managerial assessments, remedial actions for evolving problems or inadequacies and determination of final recommendations. These reviews must demonstrate leadership and control, plus support and understanding of operational difficulties.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marketing Educators: a Recommendation**

Marketing educators should include implementation issues more formally and fully in their courses. In order to do this, they must better understand the practical considerations encountered by marketing practitioners as they undertake core marketing activities – such as target market strategy formulation or marketing planning – and as they endeavour to implement their plans and recommendations. Coverage is needed of the necessary internal operational and resource requisites for effective marketing strategizing (cf: Figure 1), presenting suitable processes for undertaking these activities inside an organisation (eg: the A-S-P process illustrated in Figure 2), and addressing the marketing and organisational operations that must be facilitated and smoothed to ensure effective implementation of marketing strategies, plans and programmes (cf: Table 3). Currently the core marketing texts give scant coverage to such topics: a deficiency that also must be rectified.

The understanding and deployment of marketing have advanced significantly in recent years, resulting in more marketing practitioners encountering these implementation impediments. The teaching of marketing has not yet caught up with these issues. Addressing the core implementation barriers and including guidance on how to facilitate implementation should be core elements of marketing educators’ courses and set texts.
Bibliography


