

## Chapter 97

# Past, Future and Presents: Meeting New Online Challenges with Primal Marketing Solutions

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### ABSTRACT

*This study approaches educational marketing from the perspective of the customers, the students. Instructors and instructional designers have designed online learning using a process that revolves around delivery. The process addresses meeting the needs of administrators and aligns well with the growing demands of the educational marketplace. But the growing failure of students to successfully complete online courses warrants further exploration than simply adding more interactivities or instructor interaction. The authors pose that advertising and marketing have addressed complex consumer relationships for almost a century and have created long term successful customer relationships which could provide insights to help with higher education student retention issues. A look at design development research and marketing semiotics could provide greater understanding and student involvement to help marketing semiotics provide a deeper understanding of the importance of inclusion of students' life experiences and cultural histories.*

### INTRODUCTION

This study approaches educational marketing from the perspective of the customers, the students. Over the last twenty years as online learning has burgeoned, instructors and instructional designers have designed online learning and have become somewhat entrenched in a process that revolves around “just give me the facts and what we need to deliver as far as course deliverables (outcomes).” This process addresses meeting the needs of administrators, producing courses to capture and deliver content and provide necessary classes that comprise online and hybrid degree programs to fulfill growing demands

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of the parent university. This aligns well with the growing demands of the educational marketplace. But a scary antagonist has risen up to challenge these concerted efforts, that of the growing failure of students in these courses to successfully complete them and, worse, to drop out. The predicted outcomes that online learning would provide a panacea for financially challenged universities has fallen short of those predictions.

Advertising and marketing have addressed complex consumer relationships with products for almost a century (Oswald, 2012, Zaltman, 1997, Zaltman and Zaltman, 2008). Researchers in these fields facilitate investigations about the nature of how consumers make choices and they utilize established semiotic marketing techniques to explore the complex dynamics of the Internet and social networks. Through a variety of techniques they explore the complex relationships and analyze developments that can affect their customers' products continuously to best assess how their products are doing and to find ways that effectively enlist customer's buy-in and repeat purchases. Relationships seem to be less difficult to analyze in consumer marketing settings than in other organizational settings, such as nonprofit and educational settings. But nonprofits have also begun getting onboard with consumer marketing approaches, emulating successful advertising campaigns, and appealing to the consciousness of potential customers. Judging by the success of nonprofit marketing campaigns, it seems that the future will continue to include these effective techniques.

But, in many ways education has been slower to get onboard with advertising and marketing techniques. While there has been an increase in social networking and strategic marketing efforts in higher education, there remains a skepticism and reticence to embrace aspects of consumer marketing in higher education. It is time to take a closer look at what has worked well in consumer marketing and adopt some approaches that can be applied to higher education, particularly with respect to encouraging students' buy-in for online courses, and more important, to keep them engaged through to course, and ultimately, to degree completion.

Over the last several years two researchers have looked at the declining completion rates of college students in online courses and they decided to research if there might be some of the techniques used in consumer marketing that could be employed to encourage online students to persevere and complete their courses. What they discovered was a surprise, even to them; their findings are reported in this article.

## **REVIEWING WHAT WORKS IN CONSUMER MARKETING**

Almost a century ago the original "Mad Men" promoters wanted to sell their products and so they created the beginnings of what would become marketing and consumer advertising. Ad agencies began to spring up in major cities around the world and product advertising began to wend its way into the psyche of consumers the world over. Since then every major company has relied upon advertising to make their products known and purchased.

Educational marketing has focused on branding, market share, and the good will constructed from the reports of satisfied alumni and administrators eager to continue building the name and student enrollments of their university. As the market comes under more scrutiny by federal regulators and investigations looking into student graduation rates and student debt, the educational university market has begun to come into question about these very issues. It is not surprising that the for-profit market is beginning to see declines in student enrollments and there is evidence some are closing up shop, particularly the online universities (Flaherty, 2015; Baumgartner, 2015). The Federal government will continue to put

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