Chapter 72
Case Study as a Teaching Method in Marketing

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ABSTRACT

The traditional published case studies have been successfully used in marketing education for decades. However, recent changes in marketing practice, prompted by disruptive changes in the marketplace, highlight their shortcomings as an educational instrument. To remain relevant and deliver the desired learning outcomes, new or modified approaches to case-study teaching might be necessary. This chapter is structured as follows: first, the changes in business environment and their impact on marketing education is discussed. Second, the advantages and shortcomings of the traditional published case study as an educational instrument in marketing are presented. Third, new approaches to case study are critically evaluated. These are live case, participative case writing, and web-based cases.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, marketing students encounter a business world neither predictable nor comfortable, and are well aware of the fiercely competitive employment market. The business world requires marketing professionals to be flexible and agile, fast moving, and adjustable to constantly changing conditions. Rapid technological advances and globalization are the key driving forces of today's marketplace. Other factors include competitive pressures, and social and cultural shifts that manifests themselves in the fast changes of consumer trends, fragmentation of segmental structures of many markets and, in result, a marketplace that probably generates more, but less obvious, and easy-to-exploit opportunities. To be ready for such discontinuous and disruptive changes (Van Doren & Smith, 1999), companies cannot simply rely on what they've learned from the past (Warbach, 2000). Uncertainty is the key characteristic of many markets (Ackerman et al., 2003), and adaptation and survival depend on focusing not only on present challenges, but also on future opportunities and threats (Montgomery & Weinberg, 1998). Businesses nowadays need managers that stay abreast of changes, are creative and flexible, and are able to visualize the future and exploit opportunities fast (Ackerman et al., 2003). The current debate regarding marketing education is

dominated by a rather grim perspective that business schools do not prepare students for such a volatile and unpredictable environment (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011). Marketing managers find marketing theory and academic research too abstract and of little application to their work (Ankers and Brennan, 2002). This questions the relevance of formal marketing education to practice, as teaching in business schools is supposed to be based on research (Gray et al., 2007). Business schools have responded to some extent to the changing business environment, demands of marketing practice, and to changes in the learning styles of a new generation of students (Ackerman et al., 2003). One can observe a shift from traditional lecturer-centered methods of instruction in marketing to student-centered methods aimed at developing critical thinking (Smart et al., 1999). More marketing educators have incorporated activities and assignments that facilitate experiential learning, and through collaboration with companies strive to bring 'real life' to the classroom or take the classroom to the 'real world' (Frontczak & Kelly, 2000). Both undergraduate and graduate marketing education has evolved from merely presenting knowledge to facilitating learning (Elam & Spotts, 2004), and experiential learning has become the dominant learning paradigm since it was proposed by Dewey and Piaget (Frontczak & Kelly, 2000). According to Kolb (1984: 38), experiential learning is 'a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience'. It can be described as effective learning resulting from the active involvement of students with an experience and then reflecting on it (Frontczak & Kelly, 2000). One of the earliest developed methods of instruction that facilitates experiential learning was the case study method, a valuable pedagogy for applying theoretical concepts and practicing analytical frameworks in the real-life business context. As a factual description of historical events, a published case study is usually designed to meet the predetermined specific learning objectives of its author. The case method has long tradition and respected reputation in marketing education (Klebba & Hamilton, 2007). Each case study is a story, introducing students to a real business problem through a narrative. The learning experience is based on anecdotal material, focused on problem solving process, and executed in the limits of facts supplied by the case's author. In marketing education, these cases are invaluable. They provide concrete illustrations of often-difficult marketing concepts, allow for the development of skills necessary for the future of marketing professionals, and bring captivating stories of marketing success and failure. Despite their merits, traditional published case studies have their shortcomings as educational tools, which become evident in light of the current changes in marketing practice that result from the disruptive market changes. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the benefits and shortcomings of the case study method in marketing education in light of the background of changes in contemporary marketing practice and the state of marketing curricula. New approaches to the case study method, which can overcome the identified shortcomings, are also presented.

BACKGROUND

Marketing practice in the 21st century has been dominated by internet technology, which proved to be disruptive to the marketing practice, transforming not only how marketing is implemented, but also its very role in organizations (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011). As a result, some researchers postulate revisions to marketing curricula to reflect the needs of current marketing practice (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011). This involves not only the questions of what should be placed in the textbooks or what modules should build marketing curriculum. This debate, in author's opinion, reaches the very fundamentals of marketing discipline itself: what constitutes the 'core' of marketing knowledge, that is which theories and

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