

Chapter 9

Developing a Grassroots Cross-Cultural Partnership to Enhance Student Experiences

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increased globalization of the world economy makes international aspects of marketing an important priority. A growing number of business colleges provide cross-cultural experiences in marketing disciplines that help students better understand other cultures while applying their academic preparation to real-life settings. Today's students represent the first generation that has been born into the digital age, and freely use multiple technologies in preparing for classes, sharing notes, shopping, rating professors, and accomplishing multiple everyday tasks. This case discusses a class project on developing integrated marketing communications conducted by American and French cross-cultural student groups to promote environmentally-sustainable products in international markets. Modern social networking technologies were widely used both as tools for accomplishing the project, as means for presenting and displaying the results and as a medium for international marketing communications.

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INTRODUCTION

Bringing real-world relevance into the classroom is a widely-acknowledged challenge for marketing educators (Bearden, Scholder, & Netemeyer, 2000). Media convergence and globalized markets present complex and unique problems to budding practitioners, requiring skills in innovativeness, problem-solving, resource optimization, and creativity. Business colleges and schools face more rigorous demands from both employers and students for adequate and cutting-edge workplace preparation. In addressing these challenges, marketing professors increasingly utilize innovative teaching methods that include simulations, qualitative interpretive research, interdisciplinary projects and innovative uses of technology (Albers-Miller, Straughan, & Prenshaw, 2001). Such emerging and rapidly developing content areas as corporate social responsibility, marketing ethics, digital and mobile marketing, globalization of marketing, and ecological sustainability are being incorporated in marketing curricula to reflect the changing business environment (Bridges & Wilhelm, 2008; Kelley, 2007; Jahan & Mehta, 2007). This paper reports on designing and implementing a cross-cultural student team project that answers the calls for comprehensive, realistic, and relevant teaching tools in marketing classrooms, which promote collaborative problem-solving using available technological advancements, and broaden students' perspectives on the global economy.

SETTING THE STAGE

The idea for the project was developed by the instructors as a result of sharing research papers and data online: both the French and the American marketing professors were using qualitative research in their investigation, and observed substantial cultural differences in student responses to similar questions. This finding led to an idea of having student teams create marketing communications campaigns using qualitative research data collected by their international teams with the goal to introduce and emphasize the concept of cross-cultural marketing and comparative marketing. The existence and wide availability of the Internet, the availability of overlapping instructional calendar schedule, as well as the requirement for the French students in their program to fluently speak English helped avoid frequently mentioned challenges for cross-cultural collaborations. The choice of the content area for the project was mutual: environmental sustainability has become a globally urgent issue that has yet to find its way into the marketing curriculum. The intensifying development of "green" start-ups, investment firms, political initiatives and regulations creates an imperative for business schools to prepare graduates for the sustainable business

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