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Teaching Competitive Advertising

Or

What the 'Mad Men' Learned at Work

The 'New Generation' Now Learns in School

The advertising industry is very competitive. Accounts move more frequently, and the need for strategic, creative and media solutions constantly evolves. How do educators teach these disciplines so that the future advertising staffs are ready, willing and able to compete? Teaching through real world examples and team projects that have a competitive bent allow today's students to get their feet wet early in their education. Not just reviewing case histories but also comprehensive development and in some cases actual implementation gives students the dynamics of what really goes on in the advertising world. Cross discipline learning becomes the crux of a comprehensive program in today's learning environment.

Agencies both large and small, report that recent graduates with true work experience coming out of school migrate to the top of the pile of resumes as they begin their search for the appropriate role they will play in the industry. The agencies are lean and mean and no longer have the resources for comprehensive training programs many had in the days of 'Mad Men'.

Developing campaigns or projects in beginning advertising classes with outside industry individuals coming into the classroom critiquing and exposing the students to the vernacular, gives students a sense of what really goes on. This also integrates and fosters the industry having a role in shaping the next generation of advertising professionals. Participating and integrating outside projects from such distinguished companies as GM,

State Farm, PepsiCo, Yahoo and numerous others allows the students to develop work that both reaches their target demographic and that they can associate with. More importantly work on such projects that reach different older demographics stretches their thinking. Not everyone gets to work on videogames when they graduate!

A team is defined, according to Webster's, as a group working together and teamwork is defined as joint actions by this group of people. Of course those who work on the AAF and other competitions learn that the hours and months of work that goes into these comprehensive campaigns either develops that 'passion' or in some cases the realization that they are just not cut out for the industry. Beyond the skills of 'advertising' that are developed, they learn interpersonal and team building skills that form their role as an integral part, but more importantly the role of the bigger entity, a team. And, exposing others in the program or department to these competitive activities also fosters a level of excitement and responsibility that is not taught in most textbooks.

A recent industry trend in the industry has consumers create advertising campaigns. In some cases this has been successful, but the overall feeling today is that it is time for the professionals to get back and do what they do best; create solutions to marketing problems. Students of today must learn all the means to having a place in the industry, not just something short sighted and that gives a grade, today. Universities, to some extent have taken on the role of training and must continue to do so in today's economy.

As some other institutions have done, San Jose State University (SJSU) has created an on-campus communications agency, fashioned to fully integrate advertising and public relations together as many firms are doing. When someone works on media

he/she is not just doing media plans that are advertising based but media overviews that can be utilized for placement of articles or further expansion of the story and its social ramifications. A writer of press releases also learns what copywriting demands. And, strategic creative solutions need legs in all forms of communications whether written or visual. A variety of disciplines need to be incorporated into the teaching dynamics. Web design, video production, online/mobile creative development, event planning, and of course the newest forms of social media and placement all must be utilized in comprehensive communications plans.

How can this all be integrated in a teaching program? Participation on as many competitions as possible is one way. Teams collaborate in much of our curriculum and participate in numerous national, regional and local strategic and creative competitions.

SJSU was fortunate enough to participate in the recent Mountain Dew national competition in a beginning advertising class through an assignment given to teams of students. Students created a 12 second commercial for a new flavor from Mountain Dew that would be critiqued by a panel of outside professionals in the class. Next the top three winners would be submitted to the competition. A panel of national 'Dew' enthusiasts pulled together by PepsiCo would determine three finalists, one each for the three new flavors Mountain Dew was trying to introduce. Our 'Whiteout' commercial was one of the three winners. As limited distribution of the product was initiated by PepsiCo, the three finalists were given actual production budgets to produce a 15 second version of their commercial that would then be voted on by consumers nationwide at a newly created website 'Dewmocracy.com.' Together with Mountain Dew, the on-campus communications agency DB&H communications took on getting the vote out.

Promotions on campus with posters, PR stories and ads in campus media, made everyone on campus aware of the winning project and what was needed to further help win at the National level. Team members integrated a social networking campaign that spread every state of the Union. The voting continued for over two months, so reminders throughout the term of the contest were also fully integrated into the campaign. The result, Team ‘Whiteout’ from SJSU won the National competition, 44% to 40% from the next closest competitor and it is the new product flavor with to increase distribution.

Not every team wins a competition, just as in industry there is usually only one winner. Not every pitch yields and account. However the learning remains even when a team loses: how do they get up and move on to the next opportunity and try, try again. Creative submissions to contests result from our creative track classes and those internal operations (agency and creative staff on our media) that require creative solutions. Some win, some do not, but the reviewing of what and how something wins through professional comments results in the participant learning to be more competitive and comprehensive in their next submission.

Working with real clients also teaches psychology and interpersonal relations. Why did a client question a creative solution? How do we convince them this is the best solution? Justifying and presenting new forms of media and who reads or views what in educating a client are things not reviewed in most educational formats. It is the role of the educator to take the time and analyze these issues for further in-depth learning that is appropriate for the industry.

Structuring a communications program such as the one at San Jose State University with competitions in many of our classes and participating in outside projects

like the PepsiCo, Mountain Dew, AAF and creative competitions like the Addys and Young Lions as well as creating an actual communications agency on-campus with real world clients, enables the students to be trained in a comprehensive manner and for us to provide that next generation of professionals.

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