

Teaching cases

Teaching Case: A Practical Approach to Marketing Management and Beyond

Brittany Thierman, MBA, DBA^{1,2} 

¹ Marketing, Ithaca College, ² Marshall University

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This teaching case explores an innovative approach to business education that bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application, preparing students to meet the complex demands of the business world. The case highlights a project-based learning model where students are tasked with either developing a marketable product or collaborating with a local business to design and execute strategic initiatives. These projects can be tailored to various disciplines, including marketing, supply chain management, operations, accounting, and other business fields. Through experiential learning, students enhance their understanding of core principles while developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills as outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy. This case is appropriate for upper-level undergraduate marketing students and would work best using a 15-week semester format.

Teaching Objectives

- Discuss business management objectives related to case studies
- Use Bloom's Taxonomy in a strategic setting
- Apply knowledge to real world situations and scenarios through hands on experience by creating a product or connecting with a small business.

Case Synopsis

In higher education, particularly in marketing education, there is an ongoing necessity to balance theoretical knowledge with practical application. This balance is critical for preparing students to meet the demands of the marketplace, where theoretical concepts must be applied in real-world contexts. The case described where a professor assigned students at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford to either create a marketable product or partner with a local business, exemplifies an effective pedagogical approach to achieving this balance.

Research indicates that university-business collaboration enhances the educational experience by providing students with practical insights and skills that are directly applicable to their future careers. For instance, Joensuu-Salo et al. highlight that such collaborations serve as a "fast track to entrepreneurial learning," emphasizing the importance of integrating real-world business challenges into academic curricula (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2020). This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship and marketing principles.

The need for practical knowledge in education is underscored by the findings of Barzotto, which suggest that a hybrid coexistence of educational and training activities is essential for aligning academic programs with industry needs (Barzotto, 2023). This alignment is crucial in a rapidly evolving job market, where students must be equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills to navigate complex business and marketing environments.

The specific projects undertaken by the students—creating their own product or partnering with a local business—demonstrate the application of marketing theories in practical settings. One aspect of the project, pricing strategy, shows how this case study can be applied to various business disciplines.

In marketing, students can analyze consumer behavior, competitive positioning, and perceived value to determine an effective pricing strategy. They may explore pricing strategies to align with their marketing plan and target market.

In supply chain management, pricing decisions must account for sourcing costs, transportation expenses, and supplier negotiations. Students can evaluate how procurement strategies and logistics efficiencies impact overall pricing and profitability.

In operations management, students can assess how production costs, process efficiencies, and economies of scale influence pricing. By optimizing operations, they can identify cost-saving opportunities that allow for competitive pricing while maintaining quality.

For accounting and finance, students must ensure the pricing strategy covers fixed and variable costs, achieves a desirable profit margin, and aligns with the company's

financial goals. They can apply concepts like break-even analysis, cash flow forecasting, and cost-volume-profit analysis to support their recommendations.

Focusing on a single business aspect—such as pricing—allows students to develop an interdisciplinary understanding of how various business functions connect and influence decision-making. This holistic approach prepares them for real-world challenges by encouraging cross-functional thinking and collaboration. Such initiatives not only allow students to apply their learning but also contribute to local businesses, thereby reinforcing the relevance of their education to community needs. This aligns with the findings of Smeds et al., who argue that university education should function as a networked service for competence co-creation, benefiting both students and the business ecosystem (Smeds et al., 2018).

The collaborative nature of these projects reflects a broader trend in higher education towards experiential learning. As noted by Wright, authentic assessment through real-world problem-solving challenges students and enhances their learning outcomes (Wright, 2023). This method of assessment not only tests students' knowledge but also their ability to apply it effectively in practical situations, which is essential for their future employability.

This case study of the Marketing Management course exemplifies an effective framework for integrating theoretical concepts with practical application in higher education, offering a model that can be adapted across various business disciplines. By engaging students in projects that require them to apply marketing concepts in real-world scenarios, educators can better prepare students for the complexities of the business world. This approach not only enhances student learning but also fosters valuable partnerships between educational institutions and local businesses, ultimately benefiting the wider community.

Marketing management and community-engaged learning (CEL) are increasingly intertwined as businesses recognize the importance of community involvement in their marketing strategies. This teaching case can serve as a practical example of how students can effectively engage with businesses and their communities, thereby enhancing both their marketing outcomes and community welfare.

One significant aspect of this relationship is the role of customer knowledge management (CKM) in marketing management. According to Hosseinifard et al., effective CKM positively influences marketing results by fostering innovative ideas and enhancing customer relationships (Hosseinifard et al., 2020). This aligns with the principles of community-engaged learning, which emphasizes the importance of understanding community needs and leveraging local knowledge to inform marketing strategies. By integrating community insights into their marketing practices, businesses can create more relevant and impactful campaigns that resonate with their target audiences.

Additionally, the exploration of digital transformation in marketing management, as discussed by Rathore, highlights the importance of data-driven decision-making in understanding consumer behavior (Rathore, 2019). This is particularly relevant in community-engaged learning,

where businesses can utilize data to identify community needs and preferences, thereby tailoring their marketing strategies accordingly. By leveraging technology and data analytics, businesses can enhance their engagement with the community and ensure that their marketing efforts are aligned with local expectations.

As for integrating theoretical concepts with practical application in higher education, the class was assigned to either: 1. Create a product they can market (like a book sold on Amazon) or 2. Partner with a local business to help them increase their reach through new marketing initiatives. Of the student groups, some chose to create a book on Amazon while others partnered with a local business who had no social media presence – not even a website.

Learning Objectives (for those creating a product)

- Create a product to sell by use of brainstorming, assessing the market, and using the groups strengths.
- Develop the skills to create the product. Creating a book to sell on Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) isn't hard, but it does take some time to figure it out.
- Identify which social media platforms would be best to focus on for that intended product they are selling
- Create a social media strategy to promote sales
- Assess the progress of social media through marketing analytics
- Assess which strategies help to sell more products
- Understand which strategies are most successful for the market the product is in

Learning Objectives (for those partnering with a local business)

- Create a relationship with a local business, using verbal and written communication skills
- Assess the business' needs to expand their reach
- Identify which social media platforms would be best to focus on for that business
- Create a social media strategy to promote sales or leads for the business
- Assess the progress of social media through marketing analytics
- Assess which strategies help to engage more customers to purchase or follow up
- Understand which strategies are most successful for the market the business is in

Case Background

This course in the past was taught to students using case studies. The case studies would describe a situation or scenario, give the background information, and have students answer the question "what would you do?". By looking at marketing analytics students can get a better sense of what strategies should be implemented based on these case studies.

Case studies work well to teach students, but from research we know there is a big difference between "I intend

to do this” and “I did this”. This course was taught still using the case study approach, but we complemented it with the group project of running a marketing campaign for an actual product or business.

In education, Bloom’s Taxonomy can be used to help us guide our students to a greater understanding of a concept. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a widely recognized framework for classifying educational objectives and learning outcomes. It was developed by a group of cognitive psychologists led by Benjamin Bloom in the 1950s (Nayef et al., 2013; Nentl & Zietlow, 2008).

The taxonomy consists of six levels of cognitive complexity, arranged in a hierarchical structure (Hui et al., 2020; Jaiswal & Al-Hattami, 2020; Nayef et al., 2013):

1. Knowledge: Recalling facts, terms, concepts, and principles.
2. Comprehension: Understanding the meaning of information.
3. Application: Using knowledge to solve problems or complete tasks.
4. Analysis: Breaking down information into parts, finding patterns and relationships.
5. Synthesis: Combining elements to create something new or original.
6. Evaluation: Making judgments or decisions based on criteria.

The taxonomy is often depicted as a pyramid, with the lower levels (knowledge, comprehension, and application) representing more basic cognitive skills, and the upper levels (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) representing higher-order thinking skills (Hui et al., 2020; Jaiswal & Al-Hattami, 2020; Nayef et al., 2013). In the course structure of the case study method, we can use Bloom’s Taxonomy to get into the first three levels in depth. Students remember the concepts, understand what they mean in the context of the case, and apply the methods to the case study.

However, using this hands-on approach, we can dive deeper into the six steps of Bloom’s Taxonomy by also including analyzing, evaluating and creating.

Creating a Product

In the analyzing phase, students will take a look at trending products that relate to what they are hoping to create, look at sales, reviews, and keywords that can help them make sales on this journey. They can also analyze their target market, what their needs are, where they are located, what apps they are on, and use this information to help them understand more about why they should be creating this product, and why this product matters.

In the evaluating phase, students can look at their research from the analyzing phase and identify which product they should develop, who their target market is, which platforms they should be promoting the product on, as well as what types of posts or promotions they should do to sell their products. Before they finish their product, they will also know exactly how they are going to market the product and have a marketing plan they can implement, as well as control for to see how it performed.

In the creating phase, the students will have created their product, the social media channels, and the posts, and have developed a strategy to understand if their efforts were successful or not. They can compare their posts to each other to see which ones were successful, and then use that information to create better SMART goals for the next phase.

Connecting with a Small Business

In the analyzing phase, students will assess the business’ website, social media, and marketing materials. Depending on the type of business, the students may focus their efforts on building up one or more aspects of the marketing mix. Students will also look at the businesses target market, understand their market segment, and use this information to help them focus their marketing efforts.

In the evaluating phase, students can look at the big picture when it comes to marketing for the business. They will identify which aspects of the marketing mix they will focus on, whether it be their social media channels, website, or promotional materials. They will work on communicating with the business to make sure their objectives are in line with the businesses goals.

In the creating phase, students will have created a marketing campaign for the business using specific marketing channels. They will also evaluate their strategies to see if their efforts are successful or not. They will be in communication with the business to make sure they are aware of how things are going.

Turning Theory into Practice

Once the students had their products published or had their social media set up with a small business, we would then do weekly updates. During these weekly updates, the student groups would share what their efforts were for the previous week, and what the outcomes were. They were asked to track their posts and social media efforts with sales or engagement with the small business. Here is where they would see what kinds of posts were engaging better with their audience, and what posts weren’t working well. This would help them to understand what kind of posts to schedule for the following week.

This format works best for a class that is a full semester long, since it takes a lot of time to get a product published or a relationship with a small business set up. About half the semester is used for developing the product or relationship with the small business, and the other half is used for implementing and controlling the marketing objectives and outcomes. Workdays are spent working on the final group project in class. This way the instructor can gauge progress and offer feedback in real time. Here is a sample class outline:

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1	Intro to Class	Intro to assignments	One page paper on your current

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
			understanding of Marketing Management
Week 2	Intro to Case Studies	Intro to Case Studies	Workday
Week 3	Case Study #1	Case Study #2	Checkpoint #1 Due
Week 4	Case Study #3	Case Study #4	Workday
Week 5	Case Study #5	Case Study #6	Checkpoint #2 Due
Week 6	Case Study #7	Case Study #8	Workday
Week 7	Case Study #9	Case Study #10	Workday
Week 8	Midterm Exam Review	Midterm Exam	Checkpoint #3 Due
Week 9	Case Study #11	Case Study #12	Workday
Week 10	Midsemester Break	Midsemester Break	Midsemester Break
Week 11	Case Study #13	Workday	Checkpoint #4 Due
Week 12	Case Study #14	Case Study #15	Workday
Week 13	Case Study #16	Case Study #17	Checkpoint #5 Due
Week 14	Workday	Workday	Assignment: Create a top 10 list of things you've learned this semester in class.
Week 15	Workday	Workday	Workday
Week 16	Final Project Presentation		

the end of the semester, something tangible and S.M.A.R.T.)

Checkpoint 2: 10 pts – identify software to use to implement strategy

- The biggest reason marketing plans don't work is because they aren't implemented successfully. Students will research different management software programs, and what other programs they will use to market their product or service. They need to create a pro/cons list for at least 4 different software programs. Use the free version. Examples: Asana, Trello, Monday, etc. Look for all the different types of programs they will need to create, develop and implement the marketing plan. Will they need Canva? Later? Identify all the programs they will need now.

Checkpoint 3: 20 pts – creating the marketing strategy

- From the growth strategy the students want to implement, identify how they will do this. Create a list of what they will post / on what platform / on what day. This will be completed in their marketing management software and added the instructor as a collaborator so that the instructor can check progress.

Checkpoint 4: 10 pts – analytics review

- After about two weeks of marketing the product or service, student groups should have analytics available. They will need to create a report that shows: how many impressions, CTR (click-through rate), conversions, etc.

Checkpoint 5: 10 pts – analytics review

- Students will need to create a report that shows: how many impressions, CTR (click-through rate), conversions, etc.

Final Checkpoint: 30 pts - Overview of your Marketing Project

- The final checkpoint will be a presentation made to the class. Student teams will be professional representatives of the company and as so they must dress professionally. This presentation will go over all of the checkpoints and the results from the marketing strategy. From the analytics, student group will also present on future suggestions for the product/service to better meet the marketing goals.
- Slides the presentation must have:
 - Title slide with team names
 - Product/service information and why they chose this product or service
 - The pro/cons list when picking marketing management software
 - The initial marketing plan
 - Examples of posts/ e-mails sent out
 - The final analytics from the marketing plan
 - Suggestions for future marketing strategies
 - Questions to the class (ask at least 3 questions)

This is a sample of what is due for each checkpoint:

The final group marketing project is a semester long project where students will be implementing the skills and knowledge about marketing into a real (if possible) business venture.

Checkpoint 1: 20 pts – identify product/service

- Identify a business or product the students will complete a marketing plan on. This could be a real business, this could be a product student teams develop (like an Amazon KDP book) students need to identify:
 - The four P's of this product/service
 - A growth strategy that they will implement
 - Understand the market this product or service is in. What are the demographics, who is the customer avatar?
 - What is the goal for the students' marketing plan? (How many books do they want to sell by

Conclusion

The case study demonstrates an innovative approach to bridging theoretical and practical knowledge in business education. By integrating traditional case study analysis with hands-on projects, students engaged in higher-order thinking as described in Bloom's Taxonomy—moving beyond remembering and understanding to analyzing, evaluating, and creating. This dual approach equips students with the critical thinking and practical skills necessary to navigate real-world challenges effectively.

The students' projects, whether developing marketable products or partnering with local businesses, emphasized experiential learning. These projects not only reinforced theoretical concepts but also cultivated practical competencies, including market analysis, strategic planning, and the implementation of marketing initiatives. Furthermore, the collaboration with local businesses fostered community engagement and highlighted the mutual benefits of university-industry partnerships.

This pedagogical method underscores the value of experiential learning in higher education, preparing students for the complexities of the marketplace while contributing to local economic development. Future applications of this model can further explore its scalability and adaptability across disciplines, ensuring that students gain relevant, actionable skills that meet the evolving demands of their respective fields.

This case underscores the critical role of integrating theory with practice, benefiting not only students but also the businesses and communities they serve.

Class Discussion Questions

- How does engaging with small businesses provide unique learning opportunities compared to working with large corporations? What might you learn from a small business particularly in the context of resource constraints and personalized customer interactions?
- What pedagogical and experiential advantages arise when students are tasked with designing and marketing their own products, and how do these activities contribute to their understanding of entrepreneurial processes?
- In what ways does this project align with and achieve the higher-order cognitive domains outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy, particularly in fostering critical analysis, evaluation, and creation?
- Identify several strategies for success in launching partnerships with small businesses in the community (for example, how to establish trust, overcome logistical challenges, formalize the agreement, etc.).
- How did your experience working on this project help you bridge the gap between business theory and real-world application? Provide specific examples of concepts you applied and reflect on how this experience influenced your understanding of the subject.

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