

# YOUR TEACHING REPUTATION: A LITTLE BIT OF “VEGAS” GOES A LONG WAY! (PART 2)

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## ABSTRACT

*In the 2004 summer edition of the Journal for the Advancement of Marketing Education, we presented the first in a two part series regarding the establishment of one’s teaching reputation. In that piece, we expanded on one of the four quadrants associated with Luthy’s (2001) two-by-two role based model of what defines a master teacher; specifically, the “Vegas” lounge singer. We suggested that the successful personification of the Vegas lounge singer is critical in establishing a portion of one’s teaching reputation – at minimum in the eyes of the students and at maximum in tenure and promotion decisions – and presented an applied activity addressing the topic of product positioning. This article represents part two in the series and offers two more additional activities that score high on Vegas theatrics while also having the critical benefit of teaching the students a thing or two about marketing.*

## A BRAND PERSONALITY ACTIVITY

The following activity primarily addresses the subjects of branding, positioning, and targeting. As such, the activity is appropriate for several different courses such as principles of marketing, consumer behavior, marketing research or integrated marketing communications. Appropriate for either undergraduate or graduate instruction, this 30-40 minute activity works well for classes ranging in size from 20-250+ students. Through successful implementation, the activity should yield the following key benefits: (1) demonstrates the significant role of identifying intangible brand qualities, (2) illuminates how marketing strategies support/impair a brands position, (3) illustrates the importance of understanding the target market, and; (4) builds teamwork skills. Although the activity can be completed anytime during the semester, it does act as a great class ice-breaker, facilitating open discussion. And best of all, it causes students to leave class and say “Wow, that was neat!”

### **Branding: There’s More to it than Meets the Eye<sup>1</sup>**

One of the most notable marketing fiascos of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that of *Coca-Cola*’s failed introduction of *New Coke*. Motivated by *Pepsi*’s aggressive taste-test challenge, *Coca-Cola* learned the painful lesson that consumer’s select products and brands not just for their logical and tangible benefits, but also for their emotional associations and intangible qualities. For *Coca-Cola* fans, it wasn’t about taste but about owning a piece of Americana.

For many students, understanding the power of the brand – both the rational and irrational – is elusive. To

them, logic rules and irrational responses are deemed ludicrous. Ask your students why they purchase a certain brand of clothing such as *Tommy Hilfiger* and most would claim “I like the way it looks.” Long be the day you hear “Because I like feeling like the big-man-on-campus, like Tom Cruise in *Risky Business* or *Top Gun*.” Having students recognize that such “irrationalities” are often key determinants in consumer decision-making and brand image formation can be tricky. However, the following activity is a sure-fire way to alert students that when it comes to a brand, there is more to it than meets the eye.

To gain maximum “wow” power, I bring in five or six different brands from one product category (e.g., candy) versus simply mentioning them by name. Having numerous samples of the actual brand is key for allowing the students to see, touch, and taste them, with the latter being the chief reason why students note this activity as a favorite. I strive to select brands that differ in terms of the intended target markets (e.g., teens versus professionals), product attributes (e.g., hard candy versus chocolate) as well as the student’s level of familiarity with the brand. Sample brands I have used in the past include *Hersey Kisses*, *SweetTarts*, *Werther’s Original Butterscotch Candies*, *Tootsie Rolls*, *Whoppers*, and *Smarties*.

Formed into groups of 2-5 people, the students select three of the five brands and answer the following questions:

1. If this product was a movie, what would the title be and who would be the lead actor/actress? Explain your answer.
2. Who is the target market for this product?

Such playfulness bypasses rational judgment and helps elicit truer reactions. While the students are com-

pleting the two questions, I put a matrix up on the board as shown below:

Once the students are finished, I have a student from each group come up to the board and fill-in the information and discuss their rationale. Some recent examples include:

helps student's recognize the effective use of marketing strategies (be it advertising, packaging, etc.) to aid in the delivery of a solid brand position. Alternatively, for the less familiar brands, more variation occurs, which is not apparent unless illustrated on the board. Such variability is often explained either by a company's ineffective posi-

	Hershey Kisses	Sweet Tarts	Werthers	Tootsie Rolls	Smarties	Whoppers
<b>Movie Title</b>	Group 1 Group 2 Etc.					
<b>Actor/Actress</b>	Group 1 Group 2 Etc.					
<b>Target Market</b>	Group 1 Group 2 Etc.					

#### *Hershey's Kisses*

**Target Market:** Americans, young and old. *Hershey's Kisses* are seen as all-American and right for everyone (the commercials show dancing kisses rather than featuring a specific demographic group).

**Movie:** "Love At First Sight" because of the product name and because *Hershey's* wants to be seen as loved by everyone and able to please everyone.

**Actor/Actress:** Meg Ryan, she is one of America's sweethearts and is loved by all.

#### *Whoppers*

**Target Market:** Movie-goers, ages 6–25.

**Movie:** "Nutty Professor" because it is big and robust. The movie is funny and the professor gets fat, hence *Whoppers!*

**Actor/Actress:** John Candy, *Whoppers* do not seem to be a very serious product. John Candy was not a serious person.

Putting the information up on the board and then discussing the results is key for maximum learning benefit. This portion of the activity is where students realize how certain brands successfully scream a unified position while others flounder. For some of the more familiar brands, what emerges are similarities across the student groups, many times in the form of the identical movies/actors being selected (i.e., "On Golden Pond" is often selected by groups for *Werthers*). Such convergence

tioning strategy or simply the fact that the student is not part of the target market and is not exposed to the overall marketing strategy.

### **"WHAT IS MARKETING?" COLLAGE ACTIVITY<sup>2</sup>**

The following activity primarily addresses the definition of marketing and the marketing process, as well as introduces students to innovative research techniques. The activity is most appropriate for a principles of marketing class at the undergraduate level with a maximum of fifty students. The assignment lasts the entire semester, and if completed in its entirety will reap the following benefits: (1) promotes self-discovery of "what is marketing;" (2) provides a unique beginning versus end-of-semester comparison of student understanding of marketing and; (3) exposes students to an innovative research technique. Best of all, it offers a fun, creative, and interactive activity that once again has students saying "Wow, that was neat!"

#### **Enough Talk! Seeing is Believing (& Understanding)**

We have all heard the saying "A picture is worth a thousand words," but what if that picture is of "marketing?" This two-part "What is Marketing?" collage assignment – a unique beginning versus end-of-semester comparison of student perceptions of the field – will surely put this old adage to the test while teaching the students a thing or two about the meaning of marketing.

On the first day of class, after covering the syllabus

and classroom basics, I assign the “What is Marketing?” collage – a pictorial representation of what marketing means to you. With great certainty, the assignment generates several quizzical looks; some of which I interpret as “Wow, I knew this class would be a breeze” or “A collage? What is this – grade school?” And even “What’s a collage?!?” As if reading their minds, I retort “No this isn’t grade school and yes, any class is a breeze when you put the right amount of effort into it!” at which point, I delve into the Marketing Collage assignment.

**Basics of the Assignment:** Students are instructed to make a collage that reflects their perceptions of “What is Marketing?” They are told to use visual images such as magazine clippings, newspaper cut-outs, self-generated drawings, digital photos, product packaging, and the like. I ask them not to consult the book, nor fellow students, but to sit back, relax, and dig deep inside their soul to find out what marketing means to them. They are told that there is no right or wrong “collage” and that it can be as simple or complex as they desire. Additionally, I require a brief written description of what is portrayed in their collage and why the various items were selected. The collage is due the next class period.

**Initial Positioning of the Assignment:** At first, the students think that the assignment is nothing more than a quirky art project. And at this point, I cannot unveil its truest purpose – that of comparing their initial perceptions of marketing (via the collage) with their enhanced understanding of marketing (via a “new and improved” collage) only to be gained by semesters’ end. Thus, I inform them that the assignment is actually an adaptation of one of the more innovative research techniques being employed by such firms as Procter & Gamble or Coca-Cola in their quest to better understand consumer perceptions about their brands. I offer that such introspection can provide a much richer understanding of what an individual actually thinks and feels about a product.<sup>3</sup> However, unlike Procter & Gamble’s interest in evaluating TIDE or CHEER, the focus here is on “What is Marketing.”

**Assignment Discussion:** The next class is filled with excitement as students compare their work. I spend about five minutes mingling with students, while canvassing their collage. As expected, several students produce what is often hailed as the “old view” of marketing – advertising or selling. And thus, I begin the class discussion with “So what is marketing?” As students begin to share their work and discuss their perceptions, I jot on the board some key points. Consensus is often reached that marketing is synonymous with advertising or selling. At this point, I take over and introduce the students to the “new view” of marketing – it’s all about satisfying customers needs.

**Repositioning of the Assignment:** As the second class comes to a close, I inform students that there is a second part to this assignment. However, completion of the second part cannot be done today. Nor tomorrow. Nor the next day. But that it will take all semester to complete.

Once again, with great certainty, I am faced with several exasperated groans and sighs, which I interpret as “I knew this class was too good to be true.” I then continue, telling students that to really understand marketing – what it means to them, or to a firm, or to society at large – it will take all semester. By semesters’ end, students will have been exposed to all of the different dimensions and concepts associated with marketing, at which point they should be well-manned to offer a more complete understanding of the field and how the marketing process works towards achieving customer satisfaction.

Thus, the second part of the assignment is for the students to look at their collage periodically, to think about what they have been learning, and then determine if there are other marketing concepts that should be represented in their collage. As they enhance their collage, they once again write why they are adding that particular element. During the last week of class, I have the students discuss their “new and improved” collage, coupled with their written descriptions that compare their original perceptions of marketing with their current understanding of the field. The discussion is much more enlightening than the first week of class. Students certainly recognize the multidimensional nature of marketing and the complexity involved in garnering customer commitment and satisfaction. Instead of featuring only brand names or newspaper ads, the students offer up such images as red dye being dropped into a large glass of water to represent the diffusion process. Or pictures from a grocery store shelf that feature larger bottles of ketchup (versus smaller) being sold at higher prices per unit, going against one of the more well know heuristics that buying in bulk is cheaper. The discussion centers around the “tangible proof” that there is a lot more to marketing than the students initially thought, and concludes with the notion that there is probably a lot more to marketing than what they even know now.

**Overall Impact:** The assignment, if done in its entirety, provides great closure to the course. It helps student actually “see” what they have learned from their semester-long efforts and provides something tangible of what marketing means to them. They also truly have fun with marketing!

## CONCLUSION

As noted in Luthy’s article that appeared in the 2001 summer edition of the *Journal for the Advancement of Marketing Education (JAME)*, there are four different personas that must be embraced if one’s goal is to attain “master teacher” status: the bureaucrat, the traffic cop, the martial arts sensei, and the Vegas lounge singer. In the 2005 spring edition of *JAME*, we addressed just one of these personas, the Vegas lounge singer, and suggested that the successful personification of this role is critical in establishing one’s reputation, at least in the eyes of the

students, and offered an activity geared toward that goal. Building upon that foundation, this article offers two additional activities that score high on Vegas theatrics

while also teaching students a thing or two about marketing.

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### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This activity was presented at the 2002 Society for Marketing Advances conference and was a finalist in the Houghton Mifflin Pride Ferrell Innovations in Teaching Competition.
- <sup>2</sup> This activity was presented at the 2003 Society for Marketing Advances conference and was a finalist in the Houghton Mifflin Pride Ferrell Innovations in Teaching Competition.
- <sup>3</sup> At this point of the semester, I do not go into detail about the research approach. Rather, I wait until we cover the marketing research chapters, at which point we

discuss the approach more thoroughly; especially as it relates to Gerald Zaltman's patented Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET).

### REFERENCES

- Luthy, Michael R. (2001), "A Theory on What Makes a Master Teacher," *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education*, 1 (1).
- Moore, Melissa and Robert Moore (2005), "Your Teaching Reputation: A Little Bit of 'Vegas' Goes a Long Way!" *Journal for the Advancement of Marketing Education*, 2 (1).

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