CREATING THE COMPREHENSIVE DIRECT INTERACTIVE MARKETING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Continuing advances in database management and communication technologies have greatly accelerated the ability of Marketing to become more direct, highly focused, and increasingly interactive. Academic programs must be able to provide students with both the theoretical knowledge and the applied skills to meet the business expectations and provide students with distinctive and sustainable career advantages. This paper discusses how these needs and expectations are being met through the development of a comprehensive direct interactive marketing major fully integrated with a newly created institute for direct marketing. Students working within the applied, client-centered environment benefit from the blending of academic knowledge and hands-on experience in a real world setting.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing has become more direct, highly focused, and increasingly interactive. Contrary to the negative perceptions usually associated with direct marketing, consumer acceptance and usage continues to grow as evidenced in a study by Yankelovich (Gardyn 2003) that demonstrated over three quarters of the consumers surveyed had made a purchase through a direct channel during the past year. This consumer acceptance coupled with compressed value chains, individualized target markets, and personalized business relationships have dramatically changed the face of the practice we call marketing. Continuing advances in database management and communication technologies have greatly accelerated the ability to go direct. Because these changes are occurring at such a rapid pace, organizations frequently have trouble understanding and adapting to this one-to-one marketing phenomenon. Herein lies the opportunity for students and the challenge of academia. While many business firms may lack the expertise to pursue high level direct marketing initiatives, they expect their new hires, usually recent college graduates, to bring to the table the knowledge and a set of competencies consistent with the new realities of direct marketing. Therefore, academic programs capable of providing the theoretical knowledge together with the basic skill and core competencies needed in the application of said knowledge will provide their students distinctive and sustainable career advantages within the real world marketplace.

Direct interactive marketing is an exciting, robust, and expanding field of endeavor. For example, Advertising Age (Arndorfer 2004) reports that revenues from direct marketing initiatives reached an all time high in 2003 of $2.87 billion accounting for 51 percent of the overall marketing budget. Whether it is direct response mail, telemarketing or, most recently, emarketing, this component of the marketing mix continues to accelerate its role through the adaptation and application of new and ever-improving technology. This value added lift to the discipline has increased the likelihood that marketers will reach their goal of providing the right person with the right product for the right price at the right time and place. At the same time, the interactive nature of the discipline is enabling marketers to come ever closer to creating a one-to-one relationship with customers by knowing and meeting their needs, solidifying their loyalty and, thereby, creating profitable customer lifetime value.

When technology develops more quickly than most businesses can understand and apply it, a cultural lag is created. Historically, the role of academic marketing departments is to bridge this lag, or gap, by providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively create and implement integrated marketing programs (Rynes et al. 2001). During the 2003–2004 academic year, the Department of Marketing at The University of Akron took major steps to create the prototypical comprehensive undergraduate program in direct interactive marketing. This program provides students with both the knowledge and experience to help businesses become more effective direct marketers. Based on a significant alumni donation, the newly formed Taylor Institute for Direct Marketing provides students with the ideal blending of state of the art interactive laboratories with experiential instruction from experts in the field.

The following paper presents the integration of the direct interactive marketing program (knowledge) with the Taylor Institute (practice). First, the paper looks at the Taylor Institute and its triangulated mission. Second, it demonstrates how the integration of the direct interactive marketing program and the Taylor Institute serves as an important pedagogical model for academic marketing

departments, students, and businesses. It then discusses the logic and composition of the actual course curriculum for the program. Finally, the paper looks at the short term goals and future expectations for the program.

EXISTING PROGRAMS

According to data compiled by the Direct Marketing Educational Foundation (DMEF) for the Direct Marketing Association, there are approximately 39 U.S. colleges or universities, across 18 states, that report offering some form of a direct marketing program wherein at least 50 percent of the course content is spent in areas of direct marketing, integrated marketing communications, or interactive marketing. Many of these initiatives offer a certificate in direct marketing at the undergraduate level, while others offer continuing education courses, areas of specialization and, in a few cases, an actual degree. At least 11 of the schools have direct marketing offerings at the graduate level. Two of these colleges offer both undergraduate and graduate courses over the Internet (DMEF 2005).

The number and types of courses vary from one or two direct marketing and database marketing courses to a comprehensive major including both traditional (e.g., marketing research, consumer behavior, marketing strategy) and specific (e.g., copywriting, media planning, electronic marketing) direct interactive marketing courses. Only a small number of schools reported a required student internship or practicum. Finally, none of the schools indicated that direct hands-on experience with direct interactive marketing companies was as an underlying requirement for their program.

TAYLOR INSTITUTE FOR DIRECT MARKETING

The need to adapt to a highly interactive marketing environment has quickly become the focus for forward thinking leaders in the direct marketing industry, especially those focused on maximizing the firm's market value (Ortega 2004). The ever-changing pace of direct response marketing, further accelerated by enabling technologies, requires both the business and academic world to be cognizant of new trends and practices and to prepare young professionals for leadership roles in this dynamic arena.

With these challenges and needs in mind, the Department of Marketing at The University of Akron set forth to develop and implement an institute dedicated to the advancement of direct interactive marketing. The institute is conceptualized as a collaborative effort between the University's internal constituencies (students, faculty, and administrators) and its general publics (practitioners, supporters, and stakeholders). The high profile and involvement of practicing direct marketers as faculty, administra-

tors, and advisors gives the institute a unique image as both an innovative and applied academic institution.

The goals of this direct marketing institute are multifaceted, yet integrated. In the area of educational advancement, the primary goal is to design and offer a creative and comprehensive undergraduate curriculum in direct marketing that is consistent with student needs and employer expectations. In order to achieve this goal the institute seeks to discover and develop new and innovative teaching pedagogies and materials that lend themselves to more effective instruction of direct marketing strategy and practices. These new pedagogies include developing technical skills, practical learning opportunities, extracurricular support, and development opportunities for students to pursue direct marketing as a profession and career choice (Floyd and Gordon 1998). Concurrent with this education advancement of students, the institute also functions to educate the general public to the value of a direct marketing education and to promote the field as a promising and rewarding career path.

The institute's goals in the area of professional development center around offering continuing education programs (e.g., seminars, workshops, training) that extend and renew the skills and capabilities of professionals working in the field of direct marketing. In order to do this, the institute serves as a resource center for direct marketing firms by developing and maintaining a resource library containing books, videos, periodicals, and other online and offline reference materials. Additionally, the institute is fashioning learning protocols (e.g., professor-for-a-day, shadowing experience, mentoring by professional faculty, internships) that encourage and facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences between practitioners, students and faculty. At the same time, through the use of applied research, the institute will strive to discover and disseminate new knowledge in the field of direct marketing.

During the summer of 2003, the direct marketing institute became a reality due to a significant endowment from Mr. Gary Taylor, CEO of InfoCision, Inc., a nationally recognized expert and practitioner in the field of direct marketing. This generous endowment has provided the Taylor Institute for Direct Marketing with state of the art teaching resources and laboratories that enable students to gain a comprehensive hands-on education.

Business and Academic Models

From its inception, the Taylor Institute for Direct Marketing was designed to integrate a business model with an academic model to create a new, applied model of business education consistent with expanding the relationship between the direct interactive marketing industry and academia (Tapp 2003; Mitchell and Strauss 2001; Lundstrom and White 1997). From the business perspective, the academic/industry partnership is predicated on

the creation of a number of strategic alliances between the Institute and a multitude of business partners. The nature of these partnerships includes involvement in institute administration, program development, course instruction, resource management, business development, student development, and a host of other contributions.

From an academic viewpoint, the program is an highly interactive and applied program of course offerings designed to insure that graduates know practice and application as well as concept and theory (Moody et al. 2002). The curriculum is designed around the process of transforming market occurrences to databases to information to knowledge to applications. This process is implemented through sequences of foundation courses (topical content), analytical courses (fundamental skills), creative courses (marketplace perspectives), and application courses (workplace competencies).

The Mission

The Taylor Institute has a three-fold mission of teaching, research and service. Exhibit 1 illustrates the relationship of these pillars of business education.

The Institute's teaching mission is to enhance direct marketing curricula programs and instructional pedagogies. The educational advancement goals include:

♦ Creating and offering a direct marketing curriculum that is consistent with student needs and employer expectations.

♦ Discovering and developing more effective pedagogies for teaching direct marketing concepts and practices.

♦ Providing and supporting direct marketing learning opportunities and experiences through an extensive program of internships, practicums, and scholarships.

♦ Developing and sponsoring extracurricular activities for students interested in direct marketing as a profession and career path.

The research mission is to advance the theory and practice of direct marketing through theoretical and applied research. The knowledge advancement goals include:

♦ Designing and establishing a database marketing resource center that is capable of supporting and fostering both theoretical and applied research.

♦ Publishing and disseminating scholarly and applied research findings in academic journals and trade publications.

♦ Funding and sponsoring student, faculty, and practitioner research projects and inquiries.

♦ Writing and submitting direct market research grant proposals for funding by public institutions and private organizations.

The service mission is to serve the direct marketing industry and its interested publics by providing programming that enhances and promotes the general well-being of the profession and those business organizations involved with it. Professional service goals include:

♦ Developing and offering seminars, workshops, training and other developmental programming that extends and renews the skills and capabilities of professionals working in the field of direct marketing.

♦ Arranging and extending consultation services and direct marketing expertise to business clients looking for advice and assistance.

♦ Organizing and sponsoring a local professional direct marketing organization and/or affiliation.

♦ Representing and promoting the direct marketing industry and specific businesses/companies to local and national communities.

The Facility

The Taylor Institute for Direct Marketing was conceived and developed as an integrated marketing facility that provides students, faculty, and clients with a unique business environment in which to both develop and apply ideas and concepts within an experiential context. Thus the facility closely resembles an open agency environment allowing students to formulate and test their ideas and develop their skills in a highly creative and interactive environment. The facility has been constructed around a project flow model (see Exhibit 2) that enables the student to use a series of laboratories for ideation, analysis, development of creative, campaign testing, and implementation and presentation of results to clients. Students and faculty have access to state of the art analytics, creative, telemarketing, and other laboratories. They also have access to a direct marketing library (books, videos, online tools) and conference rooms for meetings and client presentations. Future additions, currently under consideration, include a usability lab/focus group room, an emarketing laboratory, and a small infomercial studio.

The creation and execution of this particular physical facility model is essential to the development of actual student skills. Not only does the facility provide a professional business environment in which to work, it provides state of the art technology coupled with experienced, professional instruction. Students use real tools working with real experts by participating in real world projects (Tapp 2003). Direct marketing business sponsors work very closely with the students by providing them with real projects, real data, and internships or practicums. Students completing the program are well versed in all aspects of direct interactive marketing and have demonstrated hands-on experience with real clients.

EXHIBIT 1

Taylor Institute For Direct Marketing

Research Mission
Teaching Mission
Service Mission

Academic

Business

EXHIBIT 2

EXPERIENCE
"Workplace Competencies"

Facilities
Telemarketing Call Center
E-Marketing Learning Lab
Direct Response Lab
Direct Response Lab

Courses
Direct Interactive Marketing Practicum
Internship In Business Administration

KNOWLEDGE
"Marketplace Perspective"

Facilities
Creative Laboratory

Courses
Creative Marketing
Marketing Strategy

Academic Model
"The Process"

DATA
"Foundational Concepts"

Facilities
Seminar Room
Seminar Room
Breakout Room
Lecture Hall

Courses
Direct Interactive Marketing
E-Marketing Practices
Integrated Marketing Communications

INFORMATION
"Fundamental Skills"

Facilities:
Analytics Laboratory

Courses
E-Business Applications
Marketing Analytics
Analytical Emphasis Electives

Key:
Funded Facilities
Unfunded Facilities
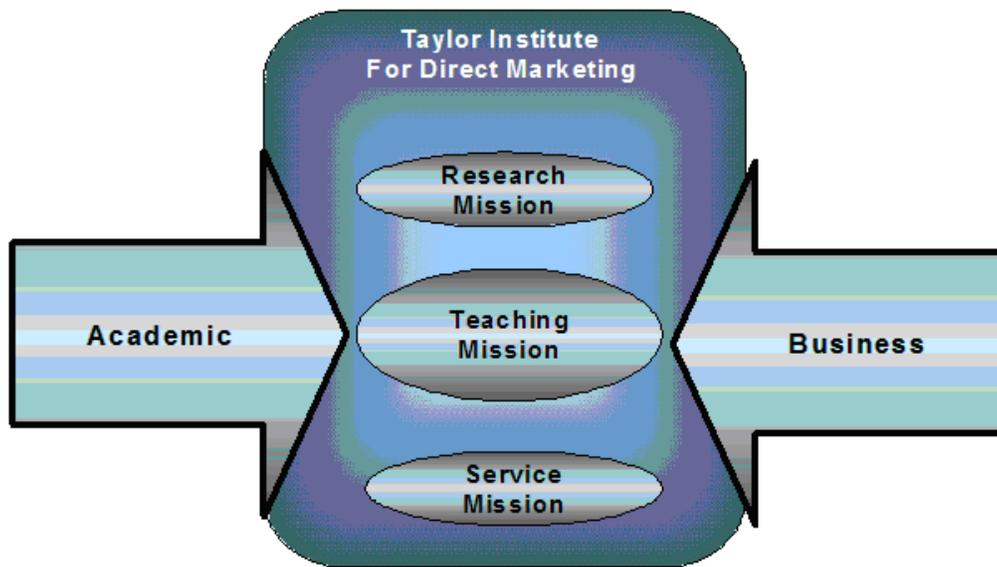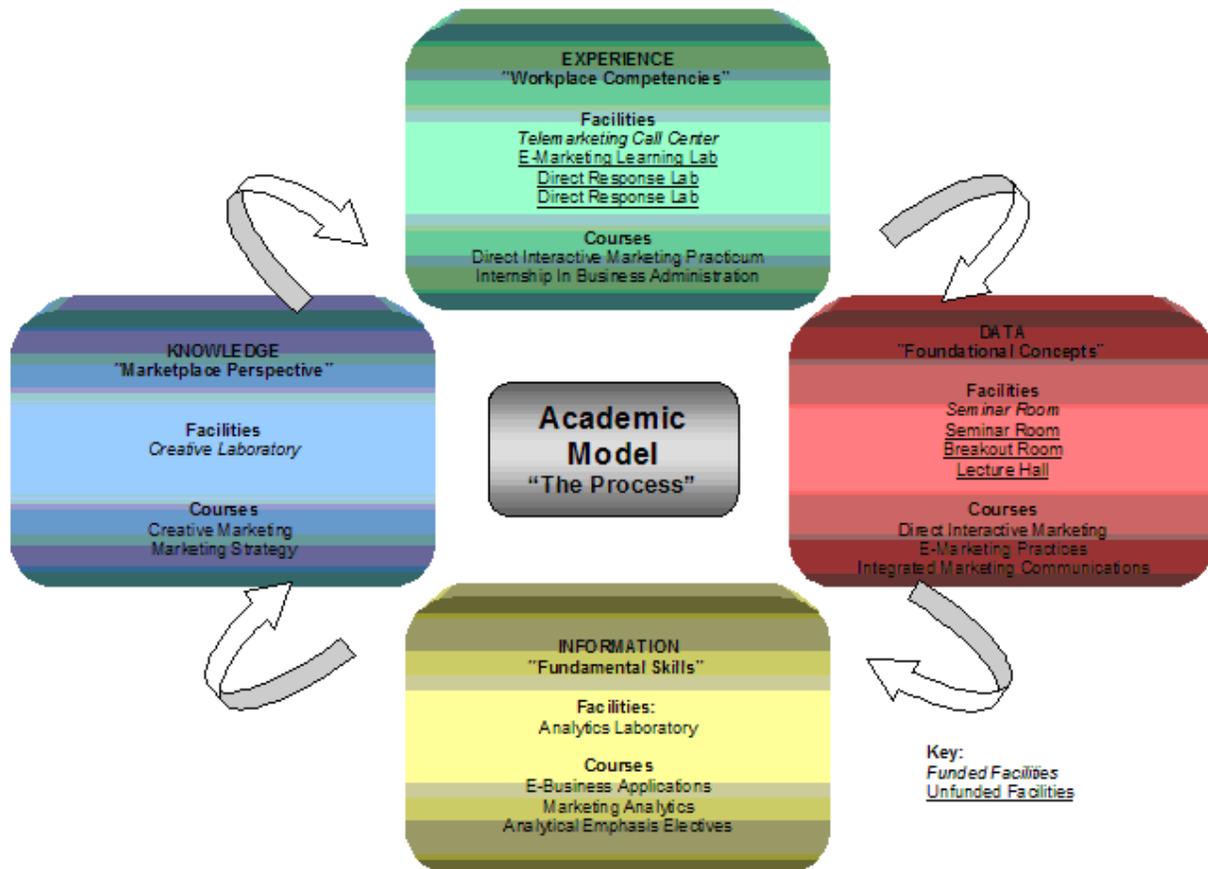
THE LEARNING MODEL

In their excellent discussion of the role of academicians and practitioners in the development of Internet Marketing and E-Commerce curricula, Mitchell and Strauss (2001) posit that business schools should work closely with practitioners to create relevant curricula and course content. This is the primary goal of the Taylor Institute and the related eMarketing and Advertising major. In order to fully utilize the resources of the Taylor Institute and to provide students with a comprehensive academic experience, a learning model was created based on the work of Bloom (1956). Specifically, the classic Bloom model recommends that students progress from memorization to critical thinking via a number of integrated, progressive stages or modules using the previous module as the foundation for the next. Early in the program courses are designed to provide students with basic knowledge and comprehension focusing on concepts, theories and processes. For the direct interactive marketing program discussed in this paper these courses comprise the foundation module.

Building on the foundation module, students next move into the areas of application and analysis. In this stage students hone t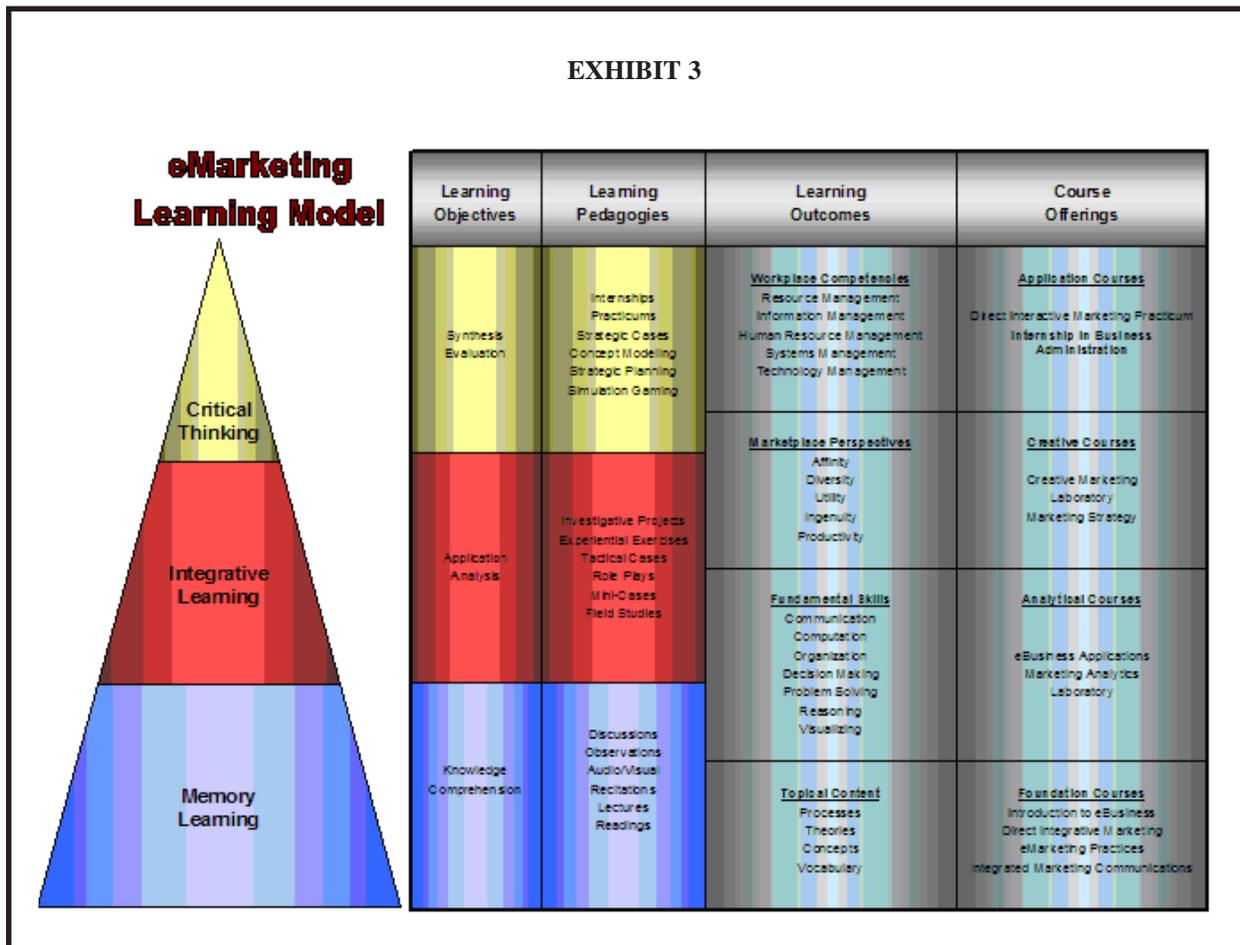heir decision making, problem solving and communication skills through in class exercises and projects. This is handled through an analytical module (data mining, analysis, interpretation, presentation) and a creative module (development of creative through brochures, websites, etc.).

Finally, the students move to the critical thinking stage that requires synthesis and evaluation. This is done by providing the students with real life experience through internships and practicums with related companies. This constitutes the application module in the direct interactive marketing program.

As demonstrated in Exhibit 3, the program begins by providing the students the necessary foundation in the area of direct interactive marketing and then increases in complexity to the actual experience and application-centered courses. At the same time, the model pedagogically moves students from memorization of core concepts to integrative learning and then to critical thinking.

Looking in more detail at the Direct Interactive (or eMarketing) Learning Model, the following sequence of courses are presented. Prior to entering the program, students are required to take a series of core courses which introduces them to the field of marketing and provides them with training in micro-computer applications. Not only does this provide a good introductory understanding

EXHIBIT 3

eMarketing Learning Model

| eMarketing Learning Model	Learning Objectives	Learning Pedagogies	Learning Outcomes	Course Offerings
Critical Thinking	Synthesis Evaluation	Internships Practicums Strategic Cases Concept Modeling Strategic Planning Simulation Gaming	**Workplace Competencies** Resource Management Information Management Human Resource Management Systems Management Technology Management	**Application Courses** Direct Interactive Marketing Practicum Internship in Business Administration
Integrative Learning	Application Analysis	Investigative Projects Experiential Exercises Tactical Cases Role Plays Mini-Cases Field Studies	**Marketplace Perspectives** Affinity Diversity Utility Ingenuity Productivity	**Creative Courses** Creative Marketing Laboratory Marketing Strategy
			Fundamental Skills Communication Computation Organization Decision Making Problem Solving Reasoning Visualizing	**Analytical Courses** eBusiness Applications Marketing Analytics Laboratory
Memory Learning	Knowledge Comprehension	Discussions Observations Audio/Visual Recitations Lectures Readings	**Topical Content** Processes Theories Concepts Vocabulary	**Foundation Courses** Introduction to eBusiness Direct Integrative Marketing eMarketing Practices Integrated Marketing Communications

of the overall marketing area, it allows the students to decide whether they want to progress further into the major. Upon completing this module the students progress through the foundation module series of courses which provide the basic concepts, theories and processes in direct interactive marketing, eMarketing, and integrated marketing communications. Next, the students advance to the analytics module where they gain hands-on experience in database marketing, knowledge management, and the development of actionable business intelligence. This module then progresses to the creative module where students work on projects to gain experience in developing marketing "creative" across the spectrum of direct interactive media, strategy development, campaign planning, and implementation. The goal of these two modules, following Bloom's model, is to integrate knowledge learned with practical experience. Completion of this module leads to the applications module where students are required to utilize the accumulated body of knowledge and skills in a real life experiential environment. Working closely with expert practitioners, the students complete projects with actual clients either in the form of internships or practicums (Lamb et al. 1995).

The Major

Based on the learning model discussed above, the first direct marketing program to be developed is a major in eMarketing titled eMarketing and Advertising. The fully approved major (see Exhibit 4) consists of a total of 31 hours of coursework of which 25 hours are required and 6 are elective. All interested students are required to take the Principles of Marketing and the Microcomputer Applications for Business courses prior to entering the major. These two core courses serve as the prerequisite for the major. Additionally, a one hour career planning seminar taken by all business administration students and a course titled Introduction to eBusiness (required for eMarketing majors) is included in the core course module.

Next, looking specifically at those courses required for eMarketing major, the foundation module consists of three courses. The first course, Direct and Interactive Marketing, introduces students to the principles and practices of direct and electronic marketing and is designed to give the student an understanding of direct marketing as an integrated part of a total marketing program. The second course, eMarketing Practices, focuses on market-

EXHIBIT 4

eMarketing Major
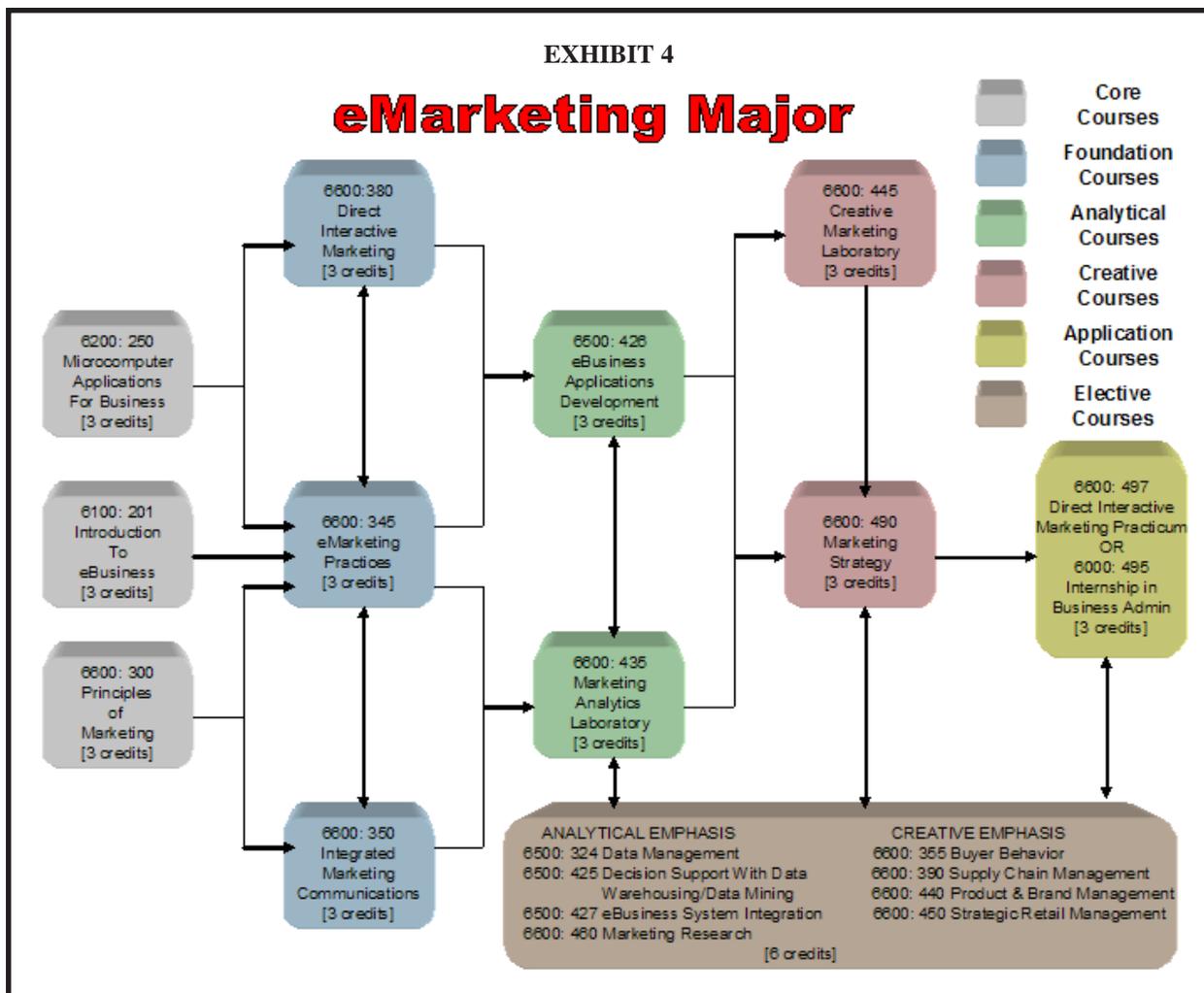
ing electronically to consumers and businesses via the Internet. The third course in this module, Integrated Marketing Communications, is a survey of the communication tools used by marketing companies to reach and sustain contact with customers and prospects.

Moving to the analytics module, two courses are provided to develop and hone the student's skills in collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting data. The first course, eBusiness Applications Development, gives the student an understanding of the issues underlying the design and development of eBusiness websites. The second course, Marketing Analytics Laboratory, offers the student hands-on experience in the understanding and use of appropriate tools and techniques for analyzing, interpreting, and presenting actionable information derived from marketing databases.

The next module consists of two courses with a creative focus. The first course, Creative Marketing Laboratory, provides the student with experience in producing creative and developing and managing campaigns. The second course, Marketing Strategy, is the capstone course stressing integration of marketing functions through development of strategic thinking and tactical applications. The course emphasizes making effective decisions to solve strategic and tactical marketing problems and includes experience in writing a marketing plan.

The final module focuses on a customized learning experience that is designed to give the individual student or a student team the opportunity to formulate and implement a direct interactive marketing project that incorporates the application of the concepts, theories, and practices associated with the student's particular field of interest and study. A qualified experience may be in the area of telemarketing, emarketing, direct response marketing, direct selling, or other forms of direct interactive marketing.

Finally students in the major take a minimum of two elective courses. Based on interest and need, students choose their elective courses from one of two areas of emphasis. The first area focuses on analytics and offers courses in data management, decision support systems, systems integration, and marketing research. The second area has a more creative marketing focus with courses in buyer behavior, supply chain management, product and brand management, and strategic retail management.

The Minors

Students in other related majors may want to gain knowledge and experience in certain areas of direct interactive marketing without undertaking the emarketing major. For these students two minors have been created. Both minors consist of 18 hours of coursework of which 15 hours are from required courses and, at least, three hours from specialized electives. The first minor, Direct

Interactive Marketing, (see Exhibit 5) emphasizes a marketing creative strategy and focuses on courses in direct interactive marketing, ebusiness website applications development, marketing analytics, creative and campaign development, and a practicum.

The second minor, Database Marketing (see Exhibit 6), focuses more on analytical processes and information technology management. In this minor the student takes data management and analysis courses and also completes a direct interactive marketing practicum.

The Future

While it is still too early to measure the success of the direct interactive marketing program, early signs are very promising. Over 140 students have signed up to participate in the major and numerous others are planning to complete one of the minors. With the business community becoming more aware of the Taylor Institute and the direct interactive marketing program, more and more interest is being generated to participate in the program. This is being done in the form of contributions, advising/instructing, internships, and providing projects for practicums. Also, local and national direct marketing associations are currently working with the Department of Marketing faculty to create partnerships that will benefit students, faculty and, most importantly, the field of direct interactive marketing.

Moving forward, the program continues to work with the industry and practitioners to provide students with contemporary theories and state of the art tools that will allow them to have a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Through a strong partnership with the business community, the program will continue to stay abreast of the latest trends and practices in direct interactive marketing. At the same time, research and applications work generated by the Taylor Institute will hopefully provide the industry with new theories and practices essential to the advancement of the field.

Among the short term future plans for the program are the development of continuing education and training programs for local businesses. This will allow these businesses to provide their employees with current strategies and skills in a fully functioning facility that emulates their actual work environment. Finally, within the next few years, the program will be expanded to include graduate level courses and possibly a MBA emphasis.

SUMMARY

Augmented by the implementation of the Taylor Institute, the direct interactive program in the Department of Marketing at the University of Akron is one of the most comprehensive undergraduate programs of its kind in the United States. At the heart of the program is a blended
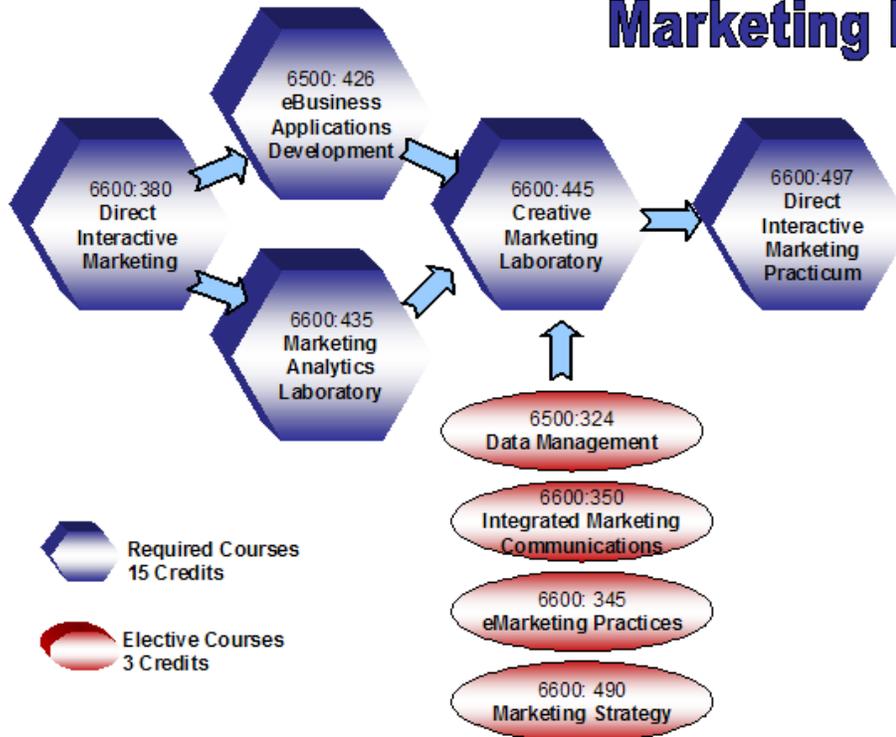
EXHIBIT 5

Direct Interactive Marketing Minor

6600:380
Direct Interactive Marketing

6500: 426
eBusiness Applications Development

6600:435
Marketing Analytics Laboratory

6600:445
Creative Marketing Laboratory

6600:497
Direct Interactive Marketing Practicum

6500:324
Data Management

6600:350
Integrated Marketing Communications

6600: 345
eMarketing Practices

6600: 490
Marketing Strategy

Required Courses
15 Credits

Elective Courses
3 Credits

EXHIBIT 6

Database Marketing Minor

6500: 324
Data Management

6500: 426
eBusiness Applications Development

6600:435
Marketing Analytics Laboratory

6600:445
Creative Marketing Laboratory

6600:497
Direct Interactive Marketing Practicum

6500:425
Decision Support with Data Warehousing/Mining

6500:427
eBusiness System Integration

6600: 345
eMarketing Practices

6600:350
Integrated Marketing Communications

6600:380
Direct Interactive Marketing

6600: 490
Marketing Strategy

Required Courses
15 Credits

Elective Courses
3 Credits

pedagogical model that is dependent on strong links between the academic and business communities. This partnership differs from other similar relationships in that businesses and expert practitioners are at the heart of the program. Students completing the program will have both the academic foundation and the practical experience to quickly become successful practitioners and managers in the field of direct interactive marketing. The university will benefit from a reciprocal partnership with the business community, one where the university relies on the direction and resources provided by the business community and businesses advance via the research and strategies developed for them by the university.

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