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Mobile Marketing Student Competition Working Brief

"The 18-24 year old segment is the best group to target for mobile marketing campaigns"

Mobile Marketing Association
2008 MMA Mobile Attitude & Usage Study

Higher Ed and Mobile Technologies

Today's consumers are becoming reliant and more comfortable with digital communication solutions, including the mobile phone, PDA, and remote internet access devices. As mobile communications devices evolve, their functionality is creating a greater and greater impact on the consumers that use them. No longer are these devices viewed simply as communications devices. They are synced and linked to almost every aspect of consumer's lives.

The capabilities of today's interactive mobile media and marketing initiatives are not lost in the college level marketing and advertising classroom. Yet a gap exists between and understanding of the proper application of mobile marketing programs and industry best practices and the actual "hands on" design, creation, and implementation of a fully functional mobile campaign. Stated simply, institutions of higher education have not yet created the programs that enable students to engage in experiental learning with regards to the mobile media space. This "gap" and its associated challenges are not new to business schools. A host of remedies have been used to provide students with the basic application based knowledge needed by the firms that will hire the students of today. Case studies, simulations, and class projects all help students apply the theoretical models discussed in the classroom and thus provide a more thorough understanding of the nuances required to implementing a given business strategy. Yet, none of these pedagogical tools compare to the student interaction of using a live client competition with prizes.

The Devil & Details

Reading about swimming and actually swimming are two very different endeavors. You can spend years reading books, watching videos (delivered on a mobile device of course), and observing professional swimmers. Each may contribute to one's understanding of the tasks required to be a successful swimmer. However, at the end of the day, you have to jump in the pool and actually swim before you can say you fully understand swimming. The same is true with mobile marketing. Lecturing, creating cases, or providing computer simulated exercises each contribute to marketing students' understanding of mobile – no question. Yet, to fully understand mobile marketing, a live experience is necessary. The tactical decisions necessary to implement even a simple mobile program can be easily lost in the classroom due to lack of actual planning for implementation.

The Learning Process

Student competitions sponsored by trade groups, industry based foundations, or individual firms have long been accepted as a means of bringing the industry standard practices to the student. Furthermore, these competitions energize students and force them to perform at industry expectation levels. Thus, the outcome is a "hands on" learning process that is rewarding for the student, the faculty member managing those students, and the industry based sponsoring agency (trade group, foundation, or firm).

There is no question that enhancing the student learning process is the primary objective. However, several ancillary benefits do exist for the multiple parties engaged in hosting/implementing the student competition. Among the most important benefit recipients is the industry. Fully enabled graduates with an understanding of the Mobile Marketing Industry, its

best practices, and associated detail oriented action plans make good employees. While even the best equipped undergraduate still has a lot of learning to complete before being unleashed upon the mobile world, the acquisition of an employee with a base level of mobile knowledge is significantly more desirable than the employee who only knows definitions and key terms. A qualified workforce benefits the industry in the long term.

The second non-student beneficiary is the firm or organization that sponsors the competition. While that firm or organization will have to provide some funding, working materials, platform usage, and the all important prize money, the public relations benefits alone can be well worth the committed resources. In addition to the PR factor, participating student teams may actually provide a working solution to the particular project outlined in the competition. If the student team's solution is actually implemented, it again generates a secondary PR effect.

Competition Design Specifications

So what exactly does it take to successfully launch a student competition and see it through to its ultimate completion? The short answer is a lot of industry support and HUGE amount of cooperation between industry and institutions of higher learning. The upside to this short answer is that both parties, particularly when dealing with the topic of mobile marketing, are willing to cooperate. The downside is that organizing all of the necessary resources can be time consuming.

A cursory review of some existing competitions have revealed that successful competitions contain the following elements.

A highly supportive trade group – The trade group provides the forum for the dissemination of information and resources related to the competition to both students and faculty. They also lend credibility and legitimacy to the competition in the eyes of faculty that will be managing student teams. The trade group will need to commit to providing "no cost" attendance to the trade event where the winning student team and their sponsoring faculty member receive the award. It is important to remember that attending a trade event is a very special event for students. All members of the trade should make them feel welcome and special. For examples of trade group administered student competition, visit the following:

- American Advertising Federation
  http://www.aaf.org/default.asp?id=122

- Yellow Pages Association
  http://www.ypa-academics.org/

- National Agri-Marketing Association
  http://www.nama.org/student/marketing.html

- Direct Marketing Association
  http://www.the-dma.org/

A Philanthropic Sponsoring Firm – Working with students and universities can be a challenging, but rewarding experience. Those firms willing to step forward with financial support rarely regret the decision to support the education process. A sponsoring firm must be willing to provide a project that is reasonably achievable by student groups, yet challenges them to truly learn about the general characteristics, behavior, and media usage patterns of the targeted market. Furthermore, student participants should be sufficiently engaged for an extended length of time by the scope of the project. Financial obligations of the sponsoring firm might include underwriting a promotional campaign to promote the competition and travel for the winning team and their sponsoring faculty member to the awards ceremony. A nominal monetary prize for winners may also be considered.

Motivated & Willing Faculty Mentors – Students will not generally engage in a competition unless encouraged to do so by a faculty member. Thus, buy of faculty members is critical to the success of any industry sponsored competition. Dedicated faculty will be spending a large amount of additional time guiding students to the knowledge they need to successfully compete. The greater the support resources available to faculty, the greater the chance of a successful introduction.

Other Considerations

- Will be competition be designed for teams or individuals?

- How many to a team?

- How will judging be completed (i.e., criteria)?

- Will there be separate prizes for undergraduate students and graduate students?