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# Using Advertising Principles to Help Marketing Students Land Their First Job

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## ABSTRACT

*As competition intensifies for entry-level marketing jobs, students of marketing must become more adept at sharpening their self-marketing and job search skills. The authors illustrate how advertising principles can be applied to this "creative" endeavor.*

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## INTRODUCTION

As marketing education enters its fifth decade of "formal" instruction, the discipline of marketing is being seriously challenged. It is estimated that 18 million graduates will be competing for 14 million college-level jobs in the year 2005 (Gault, Redington and Schlager, 2000). A marketing degree is not mandatory for a variety of entry-level marketing jobs, thereby forcing marketing majors to compete with graduates from other disciplines (Taylor 2003). McCorkle, et al. (2003) cite an unstable domestic and global economy and the fact that a typical employee will change jobs from three to seven times during their lifetime as two unsettling characteristics facing young job searchers. And finally, Scott and Frontczak (1996) reference a Michigan State University survey indicating that new college graduates are often their "own worst enemies" in conducting job searches. Trends and statistics like these compel marketing educators to better prepare undergraduate students in sharpening their self-marketing and job search skills.

## A CALL TO ACTION

Marketing educators have devoted minimal research activity to determine what can be done to enhance self-marketing skills and career placement of marketing majors (Gault, Redington, and Schlager, 2000). Deckinger, et al. (1990), nearly fifteen years ago, asserted that schools are failing recruiters in the two general areas of preparation and screening and that advertising instructors are not adequately preparing their students for the "inevitable encounters" with recruiters. Shuptrine and Willenborg (1998) exhorted professors to emphasize "practicality", real-world relevance, and direct application of concepts to jobs and careers. And

McCorkle, et al. (2003) suggest that educational programs must provide assistance and guidance to students in the job search and career preparation process.

## PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

A myriad of self-marketing plans for use as a class project have been developed and discussed in the literature (Kelley and Gaedeke, 1990; McCorkle, Alexander, and Diriker, 1992; McCorkle, Alexander, Reardon, and Kling, 2003). The literature suggests the development of a portfolio of projects and experiences that can be brought to career fairs and job interviews. Specific assignments require the student to define their existing skills and competencies, choose a career field and target a group of companies within a particular industry, and create a positioning and marketing mix strategy, including a targeted cover letter and resume. Such projects are typically assigned in the introductory Principles of Marketing class, and to a lesser extent, the capstone Marketing Management class.

Taylor (2003) presents a model for a new marketing course, "Marketing Yourself in the Competitive Job Market". This course prepares students for the transition from the classroom to the workplace, and contains four primary components: (1) job search, resume writing, and interview skills; (2) business and general etiquette; (3) presentation skills; and (4) teamwork and communication skills.

A third approach is to infuse career-readiness skills and self-marketing plans across all business and/or marketing classes. This approach does have the advantage that no new course needs to be developed and only a small amount of time, typically one or two lectures, would need to be devoted to the topic. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how

this can be implemented in the Advertising Principles class.

### THE CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY MODEL

The Advertising Principles class is one in which a majority of Marketing majors enroll. Keller (2001) has articulated a Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model that is comprehensive, cohesive, and actionable. The premise of the model is that the power, or brand equity, of a product lies in what consumers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the product over time. Specifically, the CBBE model is comprised of four "steps" that represent four fundamental questions that consumers ask about products and brands. These four "steps" are the foundation upon which a strong brand is built. Keller then discusses how six "building blocks" of brand equity—salience, performance, imagery, judgments, feelings and resonance—are arranged in a brand equity pyramid. The CBBE model is a useful device to employ as the foundation for explaining the critical principles and practices involved in building long-term brand equity. The CBBE model is illustrated in Figure 1.

### APPLYING THE CBBE PRINCIPLES

The steps in this "branding ladder" follow an order, from identity to meaning to response to relationship. Any marketing student can take this foundation for successful brand development and utilize it to enhance their own self-marketing and job search skills.

#### Establish Identity—Who Are You?

Achieving brand identity requires creating brand salience with customers. Students can take this basic principle and apply it to their job search activities. For example, Fortune and Business Week magazines publish their "Most Admired" and "Best Performers" list every spring. By familiarizing oneself with these lists, it is possible to gain basic information about specific companies. Fortune magazine utilizes eight key attributes of corporate reputation (Harrington, 2004). The top ten companies in 64 different industries are ranked from highest to lowest by industry analysts. By looking at these companies over a five year period, it is possible to understand more clearly the "personality" of a competitive marketplace.

In a similar fashion, Business Week's annual ranking of the best-performing members of the

Standard & Poor's 500 stock index is reflective of the broader macroeconomic trends (Foust, et al., 2004). The 10-part formula used for analyzing these companies is a measure that indicates corporate momentum and sustainability. Therefore, by looking at these two annual rankings, the interested marketing student can gain a generalized answer to the question, "Who are you?", by viewing him or herself as a "corporation" both in terms of their own personal description and future career plans.

#### Create Meaning—What Are You?

To render meaning to a brand, it is important to create a brand image and establish what the brand is characterized by and stands for in the consumer's mind. In applying this principle to job search activities, it once again is useful to point the interested student to the popular business press.

Four business magazines can be used effectively to better understand a corporate image. Business Week's "Hot Growth Companies" list (Barrett, Palmeri, and Anderson, 2004) highlights 100 small companies based on sales growth, earnings growth, and return on capital. Forbes's "Hot Shots 200 Up & Comers" (2003), is similar to Business Week's compilation. Fortune magazine has three lists to be perused: (1) "The 100 Best Companies to Work For" (Boorstin, 2004); (2) "The Fastest-Growing Companies" (2004); and (3) "50 Best Companies for Minorities" (Daniels, 2004). And finally, Money's "Corporate America's Best Benefits" (2002) profiles the "benefit cornerstones" of retirement plans, health care, stock options and insurance. By looking at any of these "performance dimensions" of various corporations, the student can inculcate them in his or her mind, and start formulating a more specific response to the question, "What are you?", by participating in academic honor, scholar, or social organizations that will enhance his or her personal performance capabilities.

#### Elicit Response—What Do I Think or Feel About You?

Brand judgments focus on consumers' personal opinions about the brand based on how they put together different performance and imagery associations. Aaker (1997) identifies five dimensions of brand personality: (1) sincerity (honest, wholesome, cheerful); (2) excitement (daring, imaginative, up-to-date); (3) competence (reliable, intelligent, successful); (4) sophistication (upper-class, charming); and (5) ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough). This basic positioning principle can also be

applied to the corporation. Fombrun and van Riel (2004) postulate their Reputation Quotient as being composed of six dimensions: (1) emotional appeal; (2) products and services; (3) workplace environment; (4) financial performance; (5) vision and leadership; and (6) social responsibility. They establish three archetypical organizations—the Stellar Rep; the Hidden Champion; and the Tarnished Star—and present insights and perspectives on how to manage each type. When the student understands the importance of the “What do I think or feel about you?” question, he or she is ready to consider early networking opportunities with faculty or other professionals in college that will eventually lead to receiving a personal letter of recommendation for employment. After this, the student is ready to consider the fourth question.

### **Forge The Relationship—What Kind of Association Do I Want With You?**

Brand resonance refers to the nature of the relationship customers have with the brand and whether they feel sympathetic toward the brand. The student must now determine if they want to seek employment with a specific organization. He or she must now think of him or herself as a product to be differentiated and promoted.

Internships and other experiential education opportunities are means by which the student can better crystallize their job interests and abilities, increase business contacts, and enhance their knowledge of the overall job market (Gault, Redington, and Schlager, 2000). This is one of the most effective ways that a student can be proactive in finding their first job (Vence, 2003). This will be the best opportunity for the student to judge whether the organization “fits” their character (Lam, 2004) and for the organization to recognize them as a candidate of choice. Moreover, this will be the impetus for the student to discern the “value” of non-paid internships or experiential education for the sake of developing personal resonance that will manifest itself in the resume and job interview. Finally, in the job interview, the student can apply the most

fundamental advertising principle to their self-marketing and job search skills by bringing all of his or her preparation together to land that first job. Alleyne (2003) summarized a successful interviewing technique with an acronym: (1) Show your accomplishments; (2) Enthusiasm to demonstrate your interest; (3) Listen to understand what precisely you’ve been asked; and (4) Leverage your skills to show how the company can benefit from your knowledge and expertise.

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how advertising principles delineated in the CBBE model can help a marketing student land their first job. However, it would be an egregious error of omission not to suggest a marketing curriculum that would develop and enhance the student’s self-marketing and job search skills and competencies. In addition to the introductory “building-block” course, Principles of Marketing, the student should give serious consideration to Services Marketing, Interactive Marketing, Marketing Research, Strategic Marketing Planning, and Case Studies in Marketing. The end result would be a well-balanced educational experience that empowers and enables an appreciation of how specific marketing principles can be applied to an individual entity.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article presents the CBBE model as a way to illustrate fundamental advertising principles and personally apply them to help a marketing student land their first job. It is an actionable tool that any marketing student can use to sharpen their self-marketing and job search skills. Moreover, it is an effective way to integrate career-readiness skills into an existing marketing class. And finally, it is a practical way to illustrate how the student must be focused and disciplined in successfully building his/her own “brand equity”. Because in the final analysis, if you can’t market yourself, how are you going to effectively market a brand or an organization?

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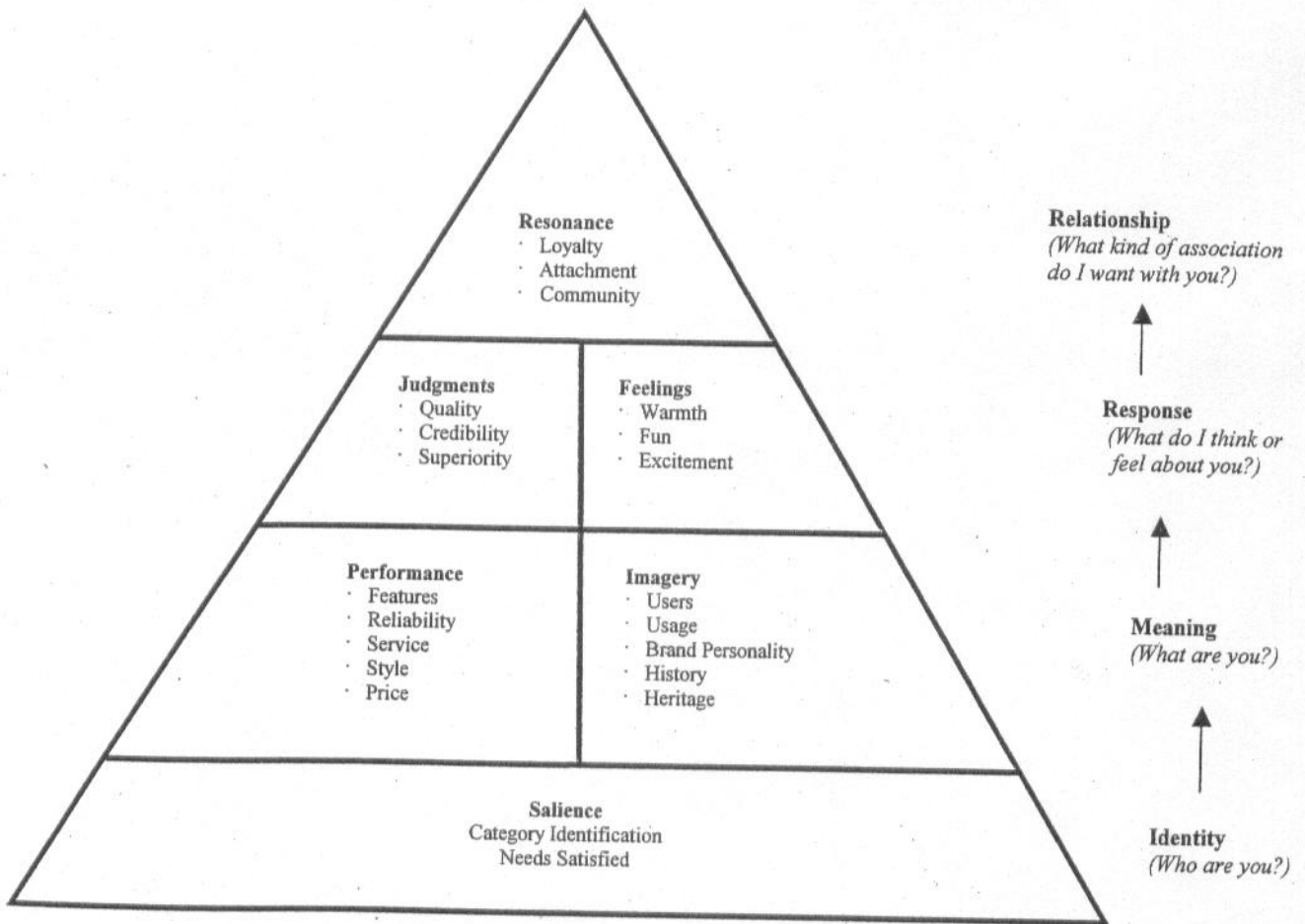
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FIGURE 1.

THE CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY MODEL



Note: Adapted from Keller (2001)