

YOUR TEACHING REPUTATION: A LITTLE BIT OF “VEGAS” GOES A LONG WAY!

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ABSTRACT

In the 2001 summer edition of the Journal for the Advancement of Marketing Education, Luthy offered a two-by-two role-based model of what defines a master teacher. We address one quadrant of this matrix – the Vegas lounge singer. Similar to Luthy, we view the Vegas lounge singer as someone that teaches in a style that captures attention. The ability to attract and sustain attention is especially critical in classes in which either a large majority of the students are non-marketing majors or the class is required of all marketing majors. Either way, we end up with some students that feel trapped, often resulting in a less receptive audience to learning. We suggest that the successful personification of the Vegas lounge singer is critical in establishing one’s “master teacher” reputation, at least in the eyes of the student. We then present the first in a series of three in-class student activities that score high on Vegas theatrics, while also having the critical benefit of teaching the students a thing or two about marketing.

*Reputation and character are widely different things.
Character lives in a man; reputation outside of him. – J.G. Holland
(U.S. author; 1819–1881)*

INTRODUCTION

“What’s your *rep*?” For most of us, the last time we heard that, let alone was concerned with it, was back in high school. However, as teachers, we all have a teaching reputation, be it in the eyes of the student, or other important constituencies that we indirectly serve (colleagues, the administration, alumni, parents, etc.). Whether we like it or not, some of us are viewed as the teacher that “gives out the easy A” or the professor that “puts everyone to sleep.” Certainly, we can gawk at such remarks, brushing them off as a result of the misinformed or unmotivated student. More impressively, we can manage these perceptions. With lessons learned from the Vegas lounge singer, adding a bit of creativity and classroom drama can speak volumes to those that choose to judge.

LUTHY’S ROLE-BASED MODEL OF MASTER TEACHING

One reputation that many professors aspire to hold is that of a “master teacher.” Based on a review of what it takes to reach “master teacher” status, Luthy (2001) presents a role-based model of master teaching. His model draws on the persona associated with four different professions: the bureaucrat, the traffic cop, the martial arts sensei, and the Vegas lounge singer. Each of these roles

differ based on two significant underlying dimensions: where the action occurs (inside versus outside the classroom), as well as the type of preparation (content versus stylistic issues). In brief, the *bureaucrat* is deemed a necessary role that is played by a master teacher, revolving around content-based components handled outside of the classroom (i.e., creating the syllabus, quizzes, assignments, etc.). As *traffic cop*, the master teacher focuses on content issues in the classroom that require the professor’s ability to “think on one’s feet” (i.e., enforce policies, direct the process, etc.). A master teacher must also embody the qualities of the *martial arts sensei*, focusing on stylistic issues outside of the classroom (i.e., attending conferences, holding office hours, etc.). And finally, as *Vegas lounge singer*, the master teacher requires the ability to “work the room,” conveying enthusiasm and enjoyment based on one’s own stylistic components during class time.

Luthy notes the challenge faced by an educator that tries to embody all of these traits. And certainly, to attain “true” master teacher status, perfecting each of these roles is essential. But the reality is that for many of us, the ability (or desire) to reach such stature may not exist, for such a designation is to be reserved for the truly great. Yet all need not be lost. Much akin to the not-so-perfect-product that benefits from rave reviews due to a fantastic promotion campaign, many of us too can turn any ill-fated prose

roaming the classroom corridors into glorious phrases of praise. The key is to simply know your audience.

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

If the goal is to be perceived as a master teacher where such a designation is bestowed upon us from those that judge, it is necessary to ask the question, “Who is doing the judging?” As an academician, there are a variety of constituents that we serve and whom ultimately judge our performance: our current body of students, fellow colleagues, the administration (such as department heads, deans, etc.), and alumni, just to name a few. And although we could debate the importance of these various constituents, the reality is that student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are often the most influential information in promotion/tenure decisions for teaching-oriented institutions (Emery, Kramer, and Tian 2003). As reported by Seldin (1993), the use of student evaluations of teaching effectiveness increased from 29 percent in 1973 to 86 percent in 1993. Certainly, there is a plethora of research critiquing the value of student evaluations (see Emery, Kramer, and Tian for a brief review) as well as the biases that can be associated with them (see Baldwin and Blattner 2003). However, that fact remains that students are, and will continue to be, the voice in establishing one’s teaching rep, at least among the building corridors and at most in determining tenure.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In a study conducted by Nulty and Barrett (1996), it was determined that business students prefer pedagogies that are active and concrete. Even more illuminating is a study conducted by Stewart and Felicetti (1992) that revealed significant differences in pedagogical preferences between marketing versus non-marketing majors. Specifically, marketing majors preferred direct application and hands-on opportunities. Consistent with the student preferred classroom style and fueled by The Carnegie Foundation’s 1990 report, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate* (Boyer 1990), the trend in higher education to take teaching more seriously is real. The focus is on positive learning environments that facilitate student-centered learning. As noted by Babin, Shaffer, and Tomas (2002), “the faculty member under the old paradigm is charged with providing/delivering instruction, transferring his or her own knowledge to students, and offering courses. The faculty member under the new paradigm is asked to be far more active in helping to produce learning, through design, development, and creation of a powerful learning environment” (p. 35). Creating such an environment certainly is a challenge when the product – that of education – is deemed the most intangible of all products (Shostack 1977).

THE VALUE OF THEATRICALS

Although it might be true that some students simply want a classroom environment that is all fun and games, it can be the case that the best lessons learned (and retained) come from such frivolity (We bet you can still sing your “A-B-C’s!”). Adding a bit of fun and tangibility to the oh-so-often dry and monotone lecture can help enhance the likelihood that a key marketing principle is actually learned but also have the added bonus of elevating one’s reputation. The following applied activity addresses the topic of product positioning. Ideal for any basic marketing course with a class size of 50 or less, this activity provides a laundry list of benefits: application of the positioning concept; importance of understanding the target market; illustrates the (in)effectiveness of creativity on recognition/recall; builds self-confidence; acts as a great class ice-breaker, facilitating open discussion; allows for students (and ourselves) to call each other by name. But best of all, it causes students to leave class and say “Wow, that was fun!”

MARKET POSITIONING ACTIVITY: OVERVIEW

How many times have you studied the pictures of your students in an attempt to know their names, but when you get to class, you just can’t seem to remember? The following activity is sure to put an end to that dilemma, while also teaching the students a thing or two about market positioning.

In brief, we have the students try to position their name in a special place in our minds so that we are able to correctly call each student by their desired name. In one minute, students have to use some sort of prop to try to get us to remember their name. At the end of class, we try to recall each student’s name. The students really enjoy watching us try to remember their name and especially like giving hints when we get stuck.

We have used this activity for over seven years and we still can remember many of the students as a result of their effective application of marketing principles. Below, we have provided two examples:

- Roxanne: Roxanne made a TV out of a cardboard box and placed it over her head. She imitated the dialogue of a news program, but every few seconds she changed the intonation of her voice and stated her name. She effectively used subliminal advertising and we still remember her name.
- Levy: Levy recalled from class that we are fans of the music group Led Zeppelin. As such, he brought a song by the group to class that continuously had the phrase “when the levy

breaks. . . .” Whenever “levy” was said, he would point to himself. He effectively identified his target market.

MARKET POSITIONING: SAMPLE STUDENT HANDOUT

Objective: To arrange for a product (YOU) to occupy a clear, distinctive, and desirable place, in the mind of the target market (ME), relative to competing products (OTHER STUDENTS).

Right now, the entire class is positioned in the same place in my mind. That is, outside of each student’s physical appearance, I am unable to differentiate between each of you or to call you by name. As a marketer, it is your job to determine how to differentiate yourself from the rest of the class so that you obtain a unique position in my mind.

Think of the following example. Beer is sold under many different brand names with each beer emphasizing different features. Thus, each beer holds a special, separate place in our mind (i.e., position). For example, I have positioned Samuel Adams as a high quality micro brew with a robust flavor that is great for intimate gatherings with friends; Budweiser is a cheaper beer with a watered down flavor that is great while watching the Superbowl with friends. For the assignment, you need to do the same thing but not with beer – use your **name** (first, last, both – whatever). Within one minute, your objective is to have me remember your name by the end of class (and for the rest of the semester). This activity is similar to what

advertising firms try to do every day. Advertisers try to develop ads that are memorable and that will enhance the product’s brand so that when you shop, you look for the advertised product. If consumers do not remember the brand name or product, the advertiser has been unsuccessful.

You are NOT required to turn in any written work; however, you do need to have some sort of prop(s) to aid in your task. For example, play music, sing a jingle, or bring in a poster, etc. Remember, you do not need to spend a lot of time doing this project. Nor will you be graded on this activity (you simply get a bonus point for doing it). What is most important is that you be CREATIVE and succeed at having me remember your name. Again, remember that I am your target market. Good Luck!

CONCLUSION

The ability to suddenly transform into a Vegas lounge singer is not easy. However, to attract and sustain attention is critical in our objective as educators to transfer knowledge. This activity is one way in which you can put students in charge of their acquisition and application of knowledge. Keeping student’s interest is difficult in all classes but is especially important in classes in which either a large majority of the students are non-marketing majors or the class is required of all marketing majors. Either way, we end up with some students that don’t want to be there. Give this activity a try for a couple of semesters, ideally within the first couple of weeks of class. We think you will be surprised at how adding a little bit of Vegas works wonders in develop and/or enhance your reputation while also teaching the students a thing or two about marketing!

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APPENDIX 1
BRANDING: THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN MEETS THE EYE:
A BRAND PERSONALITY ACTIVITY
A SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Subject Area: Branding, Positioning, Target Marketing
Class Type: Principles of Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Marketing Research, IMC
Class Size: 20–200 students, typically formed into groups of 2–5 students
Activity Length: 30 minutes
Activity Venue: Typically completed in-class but can easily be assigned homework.
Key Benefits: Demonstrates the significant role of identifying intangible brand qualities.
Illuminates how marketing strategies support/impair a brands position.
Illustrates the importance of understanding the target market.
Builds teamwork skills.
Can be used as a great class ice-breaker, facilitating open discussion.
Causes students to leave class and say “Wow, that was neat!”

One of the most notable marketing fiascos of the 20th 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 *Hershey 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:

If this product was a movie, what would the title be and who would be the lead actor/actress? Explain your answer.

1. Who is the target market for this product?
2. Such playfulness bypasses rational judgment and helps elicit truer reactions. While the students are completing the two questions, I put a matrix up on the board as shown below:

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

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:

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

APPENDIX 2

ENOUGH TALK! SEEING IS BELIEVING (& UNDERSTANDING) THE "WHAT IS MARKETING?" COLLAGE: AN OVERVIEW A SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Subject Area: Definition of Marketing and the Marketing Process;
Innovative Research Techniques

Class Type: Principles of Marketing

Class Size: Any class size; yet ideal for 50 students or less.

Key benefits: Self-discovery of "What is Marketing?"
Provides a unique "beginning versus end-of-semester" comparison of student understanding of marketing.
Application of innovative research techniques.
Offers a fun, creative, and interactive activity.
Promotes and facilitates open discussion.

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.¹ 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!

ENDNOTE

¹ 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 chapter, at which point we discuss the approach more thoroughly; especially as it relates to Gerald Zaltman’s patented Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET).