

VIRTUAL “THIRD PLACES” AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF BLOGGING IN A MARKETING PROMOTIONS COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Engaging students in learning is an ongoing challenge to marketing educators. This paper examines the use of a virtual third place as one way to address this challenge. Oldenburg’s concept of a “third place” is integrated with Kolb’s experiential learning cycle to understand how virtual third places enhance learning. A case study of the use of a course blog in a marketing promotions course is presented, and benefits and challenges of the use of blog technology are discussed. Students’ assessments of the blog are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Successfully engaging students in the learning process presents a significant challenge to marketing educators. This generation of college students faces increasing levels of time pressure. Nearly 75 percent work at least part-time, juggling work and class schedules (Karns 2005; National Center for Education Statistics 2006). Many have family responsibilities, with obligations to spouses, children, siblings and parents. Adding to the burden, students are encouraged to build their resumes by becoming involved in student organizations and community service. Consequently, they rush from home to class to work to meetings each day, leaving little time to focus on thoughtful participation in learning.

One way to meet this challenge is to provide a virtual “third place” where students can join in academic discourse at convenient times and locations (Baker-Eveleth, Eveleth, and Sarker 2005). The current college-age generation routinely integrates technology with their lives (Allred and Swenson 2006). Indeed, they seek out new technologies that become extensions of their personalities. Social community sites like Myspace and Facebook are examples of their attitudes toward technology. It should be no surprise that this generation has embraced virtual communities for exchanging information about almost any topic.

In this paper, we integrate the concept of a third place with experiential learning theory and discuss its importance for today’s marketing undergraduates. We then describe the implementation of a virtual third place for students, using a case study of a course blog in an undergraduate marketing promotions course at a large, public university. Benefits and challenges of this virtual third place are presented along with students’ assessments of the experience. Finally, implications for marketing instructors who may want to incorporate virtual third places

in their courses are discussed, and directions for future research are explored.

THIRD PLACE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY

The concept of a “third place” was introduced by Oldenburg (1989), who proposed that stable communities are comprised of the first place of home, the second place of work, and a third place. A third place is defined in terms of its function, which is to provide an informal, conversation-based, public place that is accessible to all members of a community. Coffee shops, bookstores, beauty parlors, pubs, and cigar bars are all examples of third places. In a third place, people with common interests gather to interact in a relaxed environment that is neither home nor work. Visitors focus on conversation that is inclusive, rather than exclusive. By facilitating the opportunity to flesh out ideas, lodge protests, and form opinions, third places help participants to “discover what they know” and share it with like-minded individuals (Davenport and Prusak 1998). In a third place, no one is expected to play a role, such as boss or worker, host or guest, teacher or student. Hence, a third place neutralizes the status of participants, providing a ground for conversation among equals (Oldenburg 1989).

Experiential learning theory (Kolb 1976) provides a useful framework for understanding the role of third places in learning communities. Kolb conceptualizes learning as a four-stage cycle whereby experience is transformed into concepts, which are then used to guide new experiences (see Figure 1). The cycle is comprised of two axes: (1) the concrete-abstract dimension and (2) the active-reflective dimension. The concrete-abstract dimension is a primary dimension on which cognitive growth and learning occurs (Bruner 1960; Flavell 1963; Haytko 2006; Maher and Hughner 2005; Wooldridge 2006). As

students move from first-hand, concrete experiences to abstract concepts, they are better able to hold in mind various aspects of their experiences, grasp the essence of experiences as well as break them down into parts, and verbalize accounts of what they experienced. The active-reflective dimension is the second dimension. Students learn by reflecting on their experiences and internalizing their thoughts about those experiences. Thus, successful learning requires both active experience as well as reflective abstraction, which have been characterized as the “hands-on” and “minds-on” dimensions of experiential learning (Young 2002).

Another way of thinking about Kolb’s framework is to divide the cycle into external/public and internal/personal spaces, in relationship to the individual learner (see Figure 1). Concrete experiences and active experimentation are located in the external/public environment, whereas reflective observation and abstract conceptualization are internal/personal. A technology-enabled third place facilitates learning by creating both types of spaces for students. The virtual third place provides a public space that engages students in active participation. At the same time, students take part in the virtual third place at their convenience in private locations, which allows time for reflection before engaging in the discussion.

Because roles change in a third place, the shift in the instructor’s role from authority to participant is critical to success or failure. The instructor creates the virtual third place, choosing the technology and focus of the conversation, and invites participation. Students then respond to

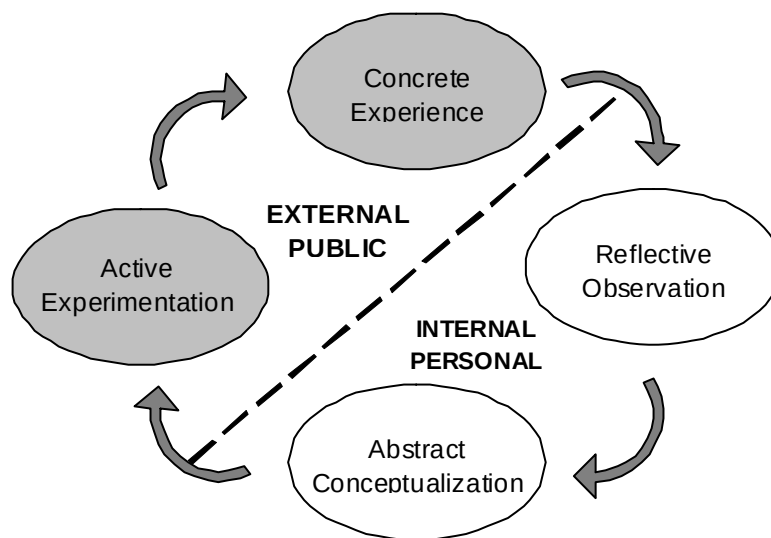
the instructor, and, over time, to each other. Arguments and counter arguments are proposed and defended. Thus, the professor becomes one “voice” among many, changing the professor’s authority role (Close, Dixit, and Malhotra 2005).

VIRTUAL THIRD PLACES

In addition to providing time- and place-independent meeting places, technology use is proposed to enhance experience-based, active learning. For example, Gillentine and Schulz (2001) found that students exhibited higher levels of involvement when using on-line role-playing. Howard, Ellis, and Rasmussen (2004) concluded students perform better when they use hypermedia technology. Because technology affords a sense of privacy, students may be willing to accept higher levels of social risk than they would in face-to-face discussions (Alghazo 2006). As students become more engaged in the discussion, they feel a greater sense of connection to the course and the associated material (Copper and Selfe 1990; Ku 1996).

In contrast, Karns (2005) found that students viewed online discussions as “less real world,” “not enjoyable,” but “challenging.” However, instructors can overcome these negative views by stressing the relevance of electronic communications to current marketing practice and the utilitarian value of such skills to potential employers. Employers are increasingly looking for technologically savvy employees (Atwong and Hugstad 1997; Priluck

FIGURE 1
THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL



Adapted from Kolb (1976)

2004). These desired employees are comfortable with electronic means of communication (Benbunan-Fich et al. 2001; Phillips 1998) and understand the potential value that technology can create for the firm and its customers (Peltier, Drago, and Schibrowsky 2003). By implementing a virtual third place, instructors can ensure that students become comfortable with the internet as a communications and research tool (Henson, Kennett, and Kennedy 2003). As Henson et al. note, students who have higher levels of technological orientation are more marketable for employment. When they perceive that they are acquiring real-world skills and knowledge, students become more connected with cohorts and engaged in the course material (Karns 1993, 2005). For example, students who better understood how familiarity with blog technology could help their careers reported more positive attitudes, and favorable intentions toward using a course blog (Levin and Hanson 2006).

Several technologies are available for creating virtual third places, including discussion boards, forums, list serves, blogs, and chat rooms. Students join the conversation in a virtual third place by logging on to their preferred internet browser, such as Internet Explorer or Firefox. Discussion boards, forums, blogs, and chat rooms can be closed-loop (i.e., only registered members can post responses or start conversations) or open loop (i.e., anyone can participate or start conversations), while listserv software supports only closed loop communications. All of these technologies support asynchronous communication, with the exception of chat rooms which are designed for synchronous interaction. In the following section, we describe the implementation of a virtual third place using a course blog in a marketing promotions course.

CASE STUDY

A virtual third place was created using a blog for a promotions course offered during the Summer 2005 and Summer 2006 semesters at a large, state university located in the southwestern United States. Enrollment for each course was limited to 50 students, who were required to complete marketing principles and consumer behavior courses prior to enrollment. Summer semester classes meet for two hours daily over a four-week period.

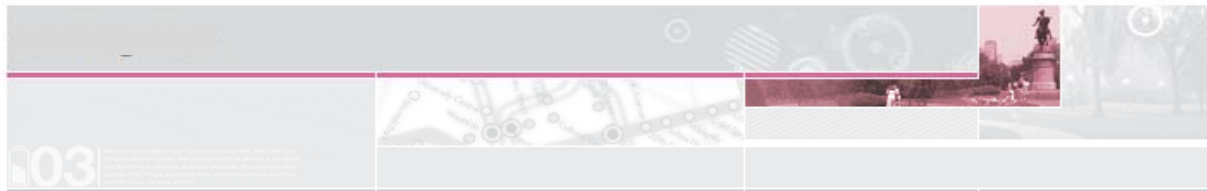
A blog – a contraction of the term “Web log” – offers several advantages over other asynchronous communication technologies such as discussion boards, forums, and list serves. Blog software allows the owner to modify the look and feel of the blog as well as link to non-blog pages, such as related articles and Web sites (see Figure 2). Discussion boards, forums, and list serves have hierarchal structures. Because of the hierarchal structure, students cannot perform contextual searches with tagging. Tagging allows users including students to categorize blog postings based on a string of terms. By using tagging, students learn about new search technologies.

Postings included links to stories filed from external sources such as CNN, YouTube, and the New York Times, among other sites. In addition, a course blog can serve as the course website with links to course specific material such as the grade sheet, syllabus, and exercises. Blog software facilitates evaluation of participation by permitting the retrieval and search of archived messages. In addition to tracking content, the blog’s owner can follow participants’ actions. For example, depending on the blog software, the instructor can view the number of postings from each student, the duration of each student’s visit, and the number of pages visited. The number and/or quality of postings are typically used to assign points. However, students will sometimes “lurk,” or read pages without posting. By lurking, students get a sense of the conversation, its tone and tenor, as they decide how to respond. Thus, the duration of each visit and the number of pages visited could also be included in the evaluation of blog participation.

Blog technology is particularly relevant for a marketing promotions course. Blogs are moving to the fore as a promotional tactic similar to couponing, advertising, or selling. Blogs are becoming destination places where people exchange information about a brand, creating virtual third places for brand communities. For example, a blog exists for followers of the Washington Redskins. At the blog, Redskins fans exchange information about the team’s success, upcoming opponents, and past events. Sellers of game tickets can find buyers while other brand members can establish meeting places to view games on television. Nike and Google combined to create a blog, Joga, that incorporated social networking features. It was launched during the 2006 World Cup. Although neither firm served as an official sponsor for that particular World Cup, the Google and Nike brands are featured prominently on the Joga web site. The site creators’ state the aim of the blog on the first page as, “Joga is a place to meet other soccer players, share your own soccer experiences, and enjoy photos and videos from around the world” (Joga 2006). This example of a blog lends itself to classroom discussions of community involvement, ambush marketing, ethics, sponsorship, relationship marketing, and other topics generally covered in a marketing promotions course. Roughly, 40 of the Fortune 500 firms maintain a blog including General Motors, Google, and Hewlett Packard (Enright 2007).

To increase students’ understanding of the potential use of blogs in marketing promotions, students wrote essays based on correspondence with blog owners. A list of blogs that dealt with areas from performance arts, software development, financial management, and even small college athletics was given to the students, who then selected a blog and corresponded with the owner. Based on a set of questions, the students wrote essays about the use of a blog as part of the promotions mix. In addition, employee blogs were a focus of discussion on the course

FIGURE 2
PROMOTIONS COURSE BLOG



Thursday, July 21

Branding's Next Frontier

Advertising on team uniforms is nothing new. Witness European football and basketball teams, whose players look like running, jumping, and sweating billboards for a variety of companies. In the U.S., this type of advertising is limited to automobile racing.

What is new then? The sponsoring company is Beijing, which will host the 2008 Summer Olympics. The branding of countries and cities marks truly the next effort in branding. Forget toothpaste. Think Bosnia!

Slogans for cities (I heart New York), states (Virginia is for lovers), and countries (Come to Jamaica) have been done for several years. Those efforts were tied almost directly to tourism. Is Beijing trying a similar tact? Or, is it attempting to make a simple association same as a city hosting a Super Bowl?

How would you brand Lubbock? Texas? Given the U.S.'s image abroad, does America need a brand? How would you market such a brand? What kind of message would such a brand communicate?

[Click here for story.](#)

posted by Michael @ **10:13 PM**  **8 comments**

Tuesday, July 19

TiVo viewers will soon be targeted by ads.

GM and the WB Television Network are the first companies to sign up for the new interactive technology making sure TiVo users won't miss its ads while fast-forwarding through commercial breaks and to let them request a brochure or follow-up call with the push of a button. The new technology plasters a logo on the screen whenever that company's commercial appears. Viewers can use the remote to find out more or send their contact information to the advertiser.

On fast-forward, a larger icon appears in the center of the TV. In a demonstration, the logo for GM's OnStar service was the only clear image when a series of commercials was played on fast forward.

Interactive ads are the latest example of a larger effort by satellite companies, cable operators and DVR providers such as TiVo and DirecTV Group Inc. to incorporate advertisers into the DVR world, which is better known for helping people avoid companies' 30-second pitches by allowing them to skip commercials when watching recorded shows. Indeed



Promotions, MKTG 4354, serves as a required course for marketing majors at
Through the use of lectures, in class exercises and electronic discussions, students actively learn how promotions relates to a firm's strategy.

Course Links

[Syllabus](#)
Updated: 07.21.05

[Grades](#)
Updated: 08.05.05
2:48 p.m.

[Class Notes](#)
Updated: 07.01.05

Course Lectures

[July 29](#)
[July 28](#)
[July 7](#)

Previous Posts

[Go Team Go!](#)
[Viral Marketing](#)
[Topics](#)
[Give Me More \(Cow\) Blogs](#)
[Stop Marketing Yummy Food to Children](#)
[The Return of the MidGet](#)
[Neuroscience and Marketing: Can They Get Along?](#)
[The Other Idea Involved a Tattoo, a Logo, and a Hamster](#)
[It's a bird; it's a plane; it's culture jamming](#)
[Branding's Next Frontier](#)

Archives

[2005-06-26](#)
[2005-07-03](#)
[2005-07-10](#)
[2005-07-17](#)
[2005-07-24](#)
[2005-07-31](#)
[Current Posts](#)

Media links

[BusinessWeek](#)
[Guardian's Media Section](#)
[Marketplace](#)
[New York Times](#)
[Forbes Best of the Web](#)

Links to Other Blogs

[Discussion of Raging Cow](#)
[Boycot of Raging Cow](#)
Note: [Richards Interactive](#) has pulled the

blog as well as in class. Students discussed employee blogs as a dimension of relationship marketing (Hunt and Morgan 1995). The advantages and disadvantages of making potentially sensitive firm information available to buyers, suppliers, lateral trading partners, and internal stakeholders were reviewed.

Learning Objectives

A virtual third place was introduced in the promotions course to encourage students to apply marketing concepts from the textbook, lectures, and in-class discussions to examples found in trade magazines, popular press, and television. It was anticipated that students would demonstrate learning by displaying higher order thinking through their comments on the blog. That is, they would read postings and related articles and reflect on the application of course concepts in their responses. Challenges to postings were encouraged and anticipated. Participation in the blog was expected to help students hone writing skills, develop the ability to support arguments, and engage in higher order thinking.

Implementation and Training

Any instructor who can use a word processor and navigate a web site can create a blog. Free services such as www.blogspot.com or www.livejournal.com require little more than the creation of a unique login and password. From there, the instructor selects a design template and then types the text. The software formats the blog automatically, based on the selected design template, and appropriately inserts the instructor-provided text.

A free service was used with the first cohort, which required students to create a login and password. Some students forgot one or both, and the service was unable or unwilling to provide them to the students. Some of the students' e-mail services treated the invitation to join the blog as junk mail and blocked it. It took about 20 minutes to resolve each instance of this problem. For the second cohort, a service maintained by the university was used. The instructor added all students in the course without requiring an e-mail invitation. Because the instructor created and maintained the login and password list, problems were easily and quickly resolved. Many fee-based commercial services offer benefits similar to the university-owned service.

For both cohort groups, a training session was held on the second day of the course. The class met in a computer lab and was walked through the registration and log-in process. A sample entry was created for students to learn how to use the software and to receive technical assistance. At this class meeting, and at subsequent times during the semester, students were reminded not to post "ditto" comments or simply "I agree." Furthermore, students were told to keep the postings positive and to refrain

from personal attacks or "flaming," as such comments would be deleted. These guidelines were also included in the course syllabus.

Assessment

For the first cohort, assessment of blog use was based on the number of postings. Students were required to post at least five times throughout the semester to receive 20 participation points. Most students waited until the final week of the course to post. In post-course comments, some students suggested the blog should be counted as a separate exercise to give it greater visibility, instead of including the points as part of participation.

For the second cohort, assessment was based on the frequency of postings. Students who posted less than seven times received 10 points, seven to nine postings were worth 20 points, and more than nine postings were worth 30 points. In addition, at least half the postings had to be completed in the first half of the course. For example, if a student posted four times in the first two weeks, then the student could post no more than four times in the remaining two weeks. Any comments beyond the eighth were not included in the student's total. Points were assigned in a separate column in the on-line grade book.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

The virtual third place offered several benefits for the instructor and the students alike. Conversations from the blog became an integral part of the course. Thoughts that originated from the blog were incorporated into the lecture as examples, and discussions of in-class exercises became fodder for the blog. For example, the results of an in-class exercise given as part of the international lecture were posted to the blog. Students then exchanged comments about the results. In effect, the blog extended discussions beyond the two-hour block in the classroom.

Students who are disadvantaged because of culture or socio-economic backgrounds may struggle with verbal communications. These students may be reluctant to contribute because they feel ill at ease with the English language, or fear social risk by advancing a poorly supported argument. For these students, a virtual third place provides an alternate means to share in the discussion. As the instructor of the promotions course said, "If I am not hearing your words in class, then I should be reading your words on the blog."

A virtual third place offers students additional time to reflect on concrete experiences such as textbook readings, lectures, practitioners' presentations, and class discussions. In this virtual third place, students could contribute to the dialogue when they were ready, irrespective of location, and improve their mastery of the marketing course material. In turn, the students are more likely to feel a connection with their cohorts as well as with the mate-

rial. It has been suggested that such a connection may not occur without the benefit of a virtual third place.

By using a virtual third place in a classroom setting, students are presented with an opportunity to hone their professional writing skills using electronic means of communication. Much of corporate communication occurs through e-mail. Increasingly, companies are using wikis, discussion boards, blogs, and so-called second life venues to exchange information with relational partners. A virtual third place, such as the course blog as discussed in this paper, exposes students to the actual use of this technology, and gives students a chance to better their communication skills.

Several challenges and problems arose with the use of a virtual third place, which resulted in policy changes between the first and second cohorts. First, as mentioned previously, most students in the first cohort waited until the final week to post. Similar to a conversation in a group, a few people spoke intermittently and then everyone spoke at once. The changes in assessment implemented with the second cohort overcame this problem.

Second, some members of the first cohort specifically disliked using blog technology, but felt compelled to contribute to preserve their grades. In turn, this discomfort may have contributed to tension between those students and the instructor. By treating the blog as an exercise graded on a sliding scale, students no longer felt forced to use the blog. Students who were uncomfortable with the technology wrote one or two postings to earn the baseline 10 points and then relied on an alternative bonus assignment to make up the difference.

Third, members of both cohorts expressed a desire for more variety in the topics. It was difficult to find topics that would adequately engage 50 people. Discussions related to cars, beer, on-line social communities, and sports generated the most comments, whereas topics related to fashion labels and museums drew few comments. Topics were selected based on what the most students would be interested in, or have enough knowledge about to contribute in a meaningful fashion.

Students' Assessments

Students provided comments as part of anonymous, end-of-semester evaluations. On the positive side, students characterized the blog as a means to learn by reading opinions of other students and a tool for improving mastery of the course content.

"I think, after reading other students' comments that I connected better to what we talked about in class" – Student AS06.

"I think the blog was helpful in supporting the concepts in class, because there was some relationship between the subject being blogged and marketing. I think it is a great way to earn points. Most of all, I have never done a blog and if it wasn't for your class I may

have never had this great experience" – Student BK06.

On the negative side, some students did not think the value gained was worth the time and effort required, while others disliked the technology.

"The articles were interesting but I feel it took more time to use the blog than I got out of it" – Student TM06.

"I have a hard time with any class that requires me to get on the internet to do something. I never got involved with the whole [instant messenger] thing or Myspace or Facebook or blogs. I am not interested in using the internet unless it is for fantasy football" – Student CZ06.

To improve future use of the blog, students suggested a required minimum number of weekly postings, rather than a total for the semester, and more variety in selection of topics.

"[Required weekly postings] would have forced me to check [the blog] and not let me put it off until the end" – Student MS06.

"I liked some of the articles but I did not get into a lot of them because I wasn't interested in the article. Maybe if you posted once a day, we could all find something that appeals to us" – Student FC06.

Reading comments from both cohorts, it was apparent that some students shifted their perspectives as the summer session progressed. Most students initially argued from their personal experiences as consumers. As blog use increased, some students began arguing from the manager's perspective (see Figure 3). This transformation did not occur in all students or even in a majority of students. However, almost all of the students directly applied knowledge from the course content. Based on the discussion of experiential learning theory (Kolb 1976), it was evident that, at a minimum, students were attempting to move from the concrete/experience dimension to the abstract/conceptualization dimension.

IMPLICATIONS

Marketing educators hold diverse views on whether or not the use of technology adds value to marketing education (Peterson et al. 2002). Some educators express reluctance to use a particular technology because they are unsure if the technology will gain acceptance outside of the classroom (Bento and Bento 2000). The use of the internet has been discussed in conjunction with teaching marketing strategy and developing forward thinking marketing majors (Edurado, Hayes, York, and Seay 2004; Schaefer and McCorkle 2003).

We propose that a virtual third place, such as a course blog, offers a constructive complement to traditional, face-to-face instruction as well as on-line distance education. A virtual third place has the potential to engage a greater number of students in discussions of marketing

FIGURE 3
STUDENT COMMENTS ON THE PROMOTIONS COURSE BLOG

10 comments:

At **Mon Aug 01, 10:02:20 PM, Amy Nordyke** said...

I would say in order to revitalize a "dead brand" my advice would be to express it as a vintage type product. Market the brand as something of significance, but exclusive and rare. Make it the brand that made it back, the one that no one has heard from in so long that it becomes "cool" again. I would suggest doing this through viral marketing at first and then moving into other areas of marketing (advertising). This way it spreads in the beginning as something that no one really knows about anymore, kind of like a secret in the re-introduction (PLC). After that enforce the advertising as the product grows back into the growth stage.

At **Tue Aug 02, 01:03:52 PM, Jessica Herrera** said...

I personally think that it is a lost cause. This brand is so far behind in image and resources, it seems impossible to catch up. I think this venture would be costly and unsuccessful. But, if it were to be done, I personally would sell it to the celebrities. Lets look at Hybrid cars for instnce, yes we have the environmentalist that love the idea but I can guarantee that most of their sales come from the exposure that the brand gets from the celebrities that drive these cars and exploit them. Sadly enough, if you are trying to sell to Americans you better reach out to whats popular: the people that are popular.

At **Tue Aug 02, 08:37:16 PM, ChrisG99** said...

I do feel as if the MG could be revived. A new model MG could be created that resembles the older MG's of the past. This new model, if successful, could revive interest in the classics. A proper marketing method along with unique and creative advertising schemes could create a positive image for the MG. A strong sense of commitment would be a must as well. Resources would have to increase over time as the company gains more name recognition. I would suggest an approach that categorizes the new MG as trendy and definitely as sporty. There is too much potential for huge gains from MG to just let go.

At **Tue Aug 02, 10:54:28 PM, Sarah Kavecki** said...

Reviving a dead brand can prove to be a difficult task for marketers, but it most definately can be done. If a promotional campagin can accomplish carrying over positive feelings into a new product it can breathe life back into the old brand. For such a venture to be successfull Nanjing will have to commit resources toward creating a new facility in China, employing a staff for both manufacturing and R&D and towards building business with its relational partners. Recreating the positive feelings which existed for the MG brand before will be the key to the success of re-introduction, as well as educating customers about new features such as safety and comfort.

At **Thu Aug 04, 10:18:39 AM, asbrignon** said...

Reviving this brand I also feel is pretty much a lost cause. The dominant car producers and brands are so dominate that it is really hard to enter the car market. Nanjing has so much to do but seems they need more money to do it. I would say in the American culture that if the car originally did not pan out a winner, that in 2005 the same will probably happen. I do not think that cars are equivilant to clothes in "vintage" terms. When the new Firebirds were remade they did not try to make it look vintage at all, because in my opinion most people these days would rather have a futuristic vehicle opposed to a vintage one.

Links to corporate blogs
About.com links to blogs
Blogs hosted at Weblogs, Inc

Other Sites

BMW
Summary of Nike's free speech lawsuit.

Contributors

Riggles
Michael
mhruska
Ashley
Candice
Ross
Brittany
Amy Nordyke
B Slye
Ilistrick
WestonL
A Phillips
Raelyn Rosemond
Brian Wolford
asbrignon
matt mckee
Tony Scanio
Ryan Robertson
bkel
Jeff
HitTheLinks
Mathias
Cristal
Heather
Kerri
Tara
Jamie Mayhall
Valerie
Jessica Herrera
molly.h.boeding
Jess
Devin Filippo
Jason
Candice A
Sheena Pearson
Aaron Anton
Casarez
ChrisG99
Jeremy
Mike Nghiem
dtrevino
Portwood
Robert Moody
Sarah Kavecki
kraemer



topics by easing time and space restraints. In addition, some students are able to achieve higher levels of learning that are beyond their reach in the traditional classroom.

Participation in blog discussions has the potential to enhance student learning by pushing them to contextualize marketing concepts in order to put forth and defend their points of view. As they internalize marketing knowledge, they are able to apply marketing concepts to their everyday experiences (Alghazo 2006). They watch television, and read print as well as electronic materials with a more critical eye. They are more comfortable sharing these observations with other people, and they can discuss these experiences at a deeper level (Tiene 2000). Finally, by using a virtual third place as a means of exchange, an instructor can promote and facilitate communication between students (Karber 2001). This last issue could be more salient with instructors who teach larger sections of marketing courses such as principles. In these sections, face to face communication could range from very little to non-existent interaction.

This paper explored a virtual third space that focuses on discussion of course content. However, these spaces could be used for other purposes, such as test preparation or help with assignments. With or without the instructor's involvement, students can exchange information about lecture notes and readings as they prepare for exams or complete assignments. The instructor's role moves from the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on side" to assist students with their transition from learning in the public

environment to learning in the personal environment.

The limitations of this paper point to interesting directions for future research. In addition to course blogs, other forms of technology can be used to create virtual third places. For example, chat software allows students to engage in real-time conversations. Wiki, or sharing, software facilitates collaboration among group members working on projects. It would be interesting to explore the dimensions of various forms of virtual third places and to compare their effectiveness to real-world third places. It would also be useful to explore similarities and differences of virtual third places for traditional classrooms and distance education.

The relationship between technology use and student-oriented outcomes needs to be examined. As more instructors implement technology that allows for the extension of the lessons beyond the classroom, students could feel more connected to the degree program. A higher degree of connectedness could lead to improved performance, higher levels of satisfaction, and increased graduation rates.

Finally, students' motivation to use technology should be explored. Some students in this case study expressed their dislike of blogs and other forms of electronic communication technology, other students championed its use. By understanding students' motivations toward using technology in a course, instructors could design a better reward system as an incentive to create a virtual third place.

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