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AUTHORS

Despo Ktoridou
Demetris Vrontis
Eleni Yiangou

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PRESENTATION GRAPHICS, MARKETING COMMUNICATION & EFL: A CASE STUDY AT A TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN CYPRUS

Despo Ktoridou[*], Demetris Vrontis[**], Eleni Yiangou[***]

Abstract

In the field of marketing communication, the use of technology and language skills is a critical issue. An important qualification for a marketer is the capacity to communicate effectively in order to convince the customer and/or the prospects. Using technological means marketers are able to exercise their profession more effectively which presupposes language efficiency and marketing communication skills. This case study examines and explores the possibilities of using presentation graphics so as to bridge the marketing communication skills along with the EFL (English Foreign Language) proficiency. In particular, a team of lecturers, from an institution of tertiary education in Cyprus, from MIS (Management Information Systems), Languages and Marketing Departments carried out a case study to identify the impact of technology and language to marketing students through the following courses: COMP-150, BADM-231and MKTG-291. This case study examines the way with which presentation graphics bridges EFL proficiency and marketing communication skills.

Key words: Marketing communication, language presentation skills, proficiency, multimedia effects, technology, presentation software, EFL.

Introduction

Chinese proverb: "Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand" (Jobber and Lancaster, 2003: 125). Similarly it is suggested that a person who shows interest in getting actively involved in the business communication.

This case study was originally inspired by the above proverb according to which a person who is actively involved in any kind of process is expected to accomplish things and succeed in the business world by qualifying himself/herself in terms of marketing communication and English language skills. This kind of success can not be fully accomplished unless the latest technological trends are implemented.

In an attempt to encourage students to think and act appropriately in the process of promoting products, the lecturers taught them how to prepare their presentations in two parts. During the first part, the presenter attempts to involve the audience in the presentation process in order to understand how the product functions in general. He or she integrates videos and/or direct connections to the internet displaying general information of the product. In the second part, the features, the benefits, the functions, and any other additional information regarding the product are presented.

Case Study Aim and Objectives

In marketing communication demonstrating a product has always been an important process. Technology and language use need to be taken into serious consideration. Technology, on the one hand, plays an increasingly significant role in all aspects of our lives, and language, on the other, is

[*] School of Business, Intercollege, Cyprus.
. [**] School of Business, Intercollege, Cyprus.
[***] School of Business, Intercollege, Cyprus.

the means by which one communicates his/her messages to the audience. The multimedia elements have enhanced the oral presentations, and enabled marketers to present their products more professionally with style and impact. Proficiency in language is considered to be a great asset for a marketer as he needs to be convincing. In addition, marketing communication skills complete the requirements for a successful presentation. Needless to say that if a marketer wants to satisfy the audience's needs he should receive encouragement and training.

Taking all these into consideration, it was assumed that it would be useful for marketing students to receive specific courses and special training concerning technology-based presentations skills that will allow them to achieve their goals in the field of business communication. Therefore, this case study aimed to evaluate the importance of language and technology in marketing and marketing communications. Developing students' knowledge in both technology and language could lead to a more effective and efficient promotion of products.

Specifically the objectives of this case study are the following:
1. To encourage students to use the Internet as a source of information and identify customer requirements.
2. To urge future marketers practice presentation software as a marketing communication tool to satisfy customer needs.
3. To examine whether allowing students to choose a product of their own choice and attempt to promote motivates them to better practice their marketing communication skills and language proficiency.
4. To examine the positive and/or negative reactions of our students during the project.

Course Curriculum and Background Literature

Intercollege A tertiary educational institution in Cyprus offers various degrees to local and international students in an attempt to educate adults in a European environment. The scope of the faculty members is not only to lecture in the old traditional way, but also to adopt ways to combine courses so as to reinforce learning. Under these circumstances, it was decided to examine whether technology can bridge marketing communication and language learning. Thus, it was considered to be important to analyse in detail the three courses involved in this case study as their connection in terms of content was expected to be beneficiary to the students (COMP-150, BADM-231, MKTG-291).

The following section describes analytically the three courses attended by the students. Each phase represents each course which is briefly explained here for the purposes of the paper. The objectives are clearly stated by being based on relevant theoretical background which is considered to be essential since it is vital for the students to have a complete picture of how things are perceived in the business world.

PHASE I: Acquiring Marketing Communication Skills

The marketing course (MKTG 291) aims to provide students with a solid foundation in the field of marketing and prepare them to become effective marketing professionals while communicating with the customer. It seeks to introduce students to the overall theory and concepts in the areas of marketing communications, marketing research, consumer behaviour, services marketing, international marketing and strategic marketing. Therefore, the course has been designed around the general concepts of marketing encompassing all facets of modern marketing in order to produce markets capable of meeting the challenges in today's marketing environment. Marketing communications, presentation and communication skills, are a very important component of this course.

Marketing communications is defined by Fill (2002) as the process of presenting an integrated set of stimuli to a market with the intent of evoking a desired set of responses within that market set and setting up channels to receive, interpret and act upon messages from the market for the purposes of modifying present company messages and identifying new communication opportunities. Marketing communications is a management process through which an organisation begins a dia-

logue with its various audiences. Based upon an understanding of the audience's communications environment, an organisation develops and presents messages for its identities stakeholder groups, and evaluates and acts upon the responses received. The purpose of the process is to position or reposition the organisation and its products, in the minds of members of the target market, by influencing their perception and understanding.

The marketing communication mix is critically important in achieving the above. It consists of a set of tools which can be used in different combinations and different degrees of intensity in order to communicate with a target audience. The marketing communications tools include advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, personal selling, internet, word of mouth, sponsorship, exhibitions and packaging.

It is also necessary that students undertaking the course understand that the pace at which technology has advanced over the past decade has had a tremendous impact upon advertisers, media owners, marketing case study and advertising. It should be noted that this rise of new technology together with the sophistication of customers have given rise to the importance of well trained and educated marketers (Kitchen, 2001; Smith and Taylor, 2002; Pickton and Broderick, 2001). It was therefore seen as of paramount importance that students understand the importance of marketing communications and its relation to technology and business language. Selling, sales interview together with the specific roles, functions and tasks of a salesperson are also highlighted.

Marketers need to be aware of these changes occurring in the technological environment and be prepared to review them as they provide opportunities to reach your target market more precisely, effectively and at a lower cost.

PHASE II: Practicing the English Language in a Business Communication Course

BADM-231 is a course taught by English language lecturers in an attempt to help students improve their knowledge in terms of how they can be successful in business through effective business communication (Bovee et al., 2003). The students who attend this course come from various degree programmes such as Computer Science, Business Administration, MIS, Marketing, Multimedia and Business Communication.

The most important goals set by the lecturers focus on the following points:
1. Communicating interculturally
2. Writing letters, memos, e-mails, business messages and resumes
3. Communicating through the internet and other technologies
4. Writing reports and proposals
5. Designing and delivering oral presentations

It is quite obvious why this course is useful to students in spite of what they study. Any career they pursue will at some point demand the ability to work professionally to satisfy both their clients' needs and their own. This is why at the beginning of the course they are taught why and how we communicate or what can go wrong. They also learn how language becomes the medium to get meanings across therefore effective.

In this case study, it was decided to give emphasis on the last point which is extremely important to marketing students. Being able to design and deliver an oral presentation successfully is by no means the most essential skill for a marketer. That is why the students who were actively involved in this case study were more or less taught the secrets of how they can be skilful presenters of their clients' products.

"There are five stages to consider for a successful presentation:
1. set your objectives
2. plan the presentation
3. prepare the materials
4. rehearse and practice

5. be ready and prepared for the day" (Ludlow and Panton, 1992: 54).

Needless to say that knowing to whom you deliver the presentation is fundamental. Therefore, the presenter should plan carefully in advance in order to adapt the messages to fit the audience's goals, interests and needs. It is vital to understand who his/her audience is and how he/she can reach them (Locker and Kaczmarek, Module 2, 2001). "It is usually true that the most effective presentations are those prepared with a particular audience in mind. By tailoring presentation to the specific likes, dislikes, knowledge and attitudes of an audience the odds for success increase considerable" (Buschini and Reynolds, 1986 p. 283). That is why an audience analysis is vital so as to realise what could please or displease the customer.

In addition, timing is an important point to consider. The students should finish their presentations within the time limits set from the beginning and make sure that their messages are clearly presented without making unnecessary repetitions. During the presentation stage, the students learn how to set their objectives, structure the presentation, consider the content, the time and the language used and finally, balance their points according to the priorities of their arguments and facts.

The real contribution of the English lecturer comes at this point where the students are helped to develop presentation skills. Using the English language correctly is not at all an easy process. Students learn and practice through a number of projects throughout the semester how to keep things explicit, avoid jokes and jargon, present the material from different perspectives and generally talk intelligibly and enthusiastically. Furthermore, they learn how to use their voice (volume, tone, pitch, speed and breathing) in order to deliver the messages efficiently. The students' voice should not be boring. They should vary their pitch and speed so as not to be monotonous, breathe in the right way and raise their voice to stress key issues. They should not also use long words and sentences. In general, they should keep the audience alert.

Except for all these, using the right available equipment is another critical issue which is extensively discussed in the third phase of this paper. The appearance and body language seem to be the final great subject analysed as the use of non-verbal communication plays a significant role during the whole process. In particular, the students are taught how to prepare themselves best by keeping in mind five elements of body language: posture, body movement, hand and arm gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact (Munter, 2000; and Leigh and Stanbridge, 1992).

Even after a good preparation, the students know that to achieve success, they need to be capable of using persuasive strategies. The recipe for a persuasive presentation lies in the presenter's ability to persuade (McCarthy and Hatcher, 2002). Overall, the aim is to try and turn marketing students into great communicators by providing them with as much as possible.

PHASE III: Presentation Software: A Practical Application

According to Long and Long (2005) many studies confirm that people who use presentation software to create presentations are apparently better prepared and more professional than those who do not.

The most popular and commonly used Presentation software is Microsoft's Power Point 2003 which offers to the users a rich assortment of tools and special effects to prepare fully multimedia slide shows and present them with style and impact. Thus, any kind of presentation, report, lecture, speech, promotion, or any other kind of academic, business or personal communication, will keep your audience's attention.

As far as product promotion is concerned, the use of presentation software to prepare a stylish presentation with animation, graphics and other multimedia components will characterize marketers, who wish to be persuasive to customers/prospects, with high professionalism.

Based on the marketing principles of demonstrating a product, students were taught how to divide their presentation into two parts (Jobber and Lancaster, 2003). During the first part, students briefly describe the features and the benefits of the product and explain how it functions/works (in cases it

was needed). In this part, students use the internet as a source of information to download live videos, animated images, images, clipart and pictures of their products. Power Point 2003 supports multimedia elements such as digitized audio and video, hypermedia links, and the control of external devices such as audio CDs. It is also equipped with custom animation that enables users to set different animation effects to a text title, bulleted points, clipart images and/or animated images.

The compatibility with the Internet and the www helps users to include links to relevant web sites in their presentations. In addition, users have the possibility to save their presentations as HTML files and place them on a web site for online access. In cases where students were not able to find live videos and/or animated images for their products, they were encouraged to use images, clipart or pictures and add PowerPoint's animation effects.

The second part involves the actual presentation itself. During part II, the presenter gives detailed information on the product such as features, models and accessories. He/she also provides the viewers with additional information for further consideration.

Based on Jobber and Lancaster (2003), students are encouraged to separate their presentation into the afore-mentioned parts. It is often difficult for a viewer to watch the presentation of a product and how it functions/works and at the same time understand its features.

It is obvious that the three courses were interrelated despite the fact that they were taught separately. Firstly, students were introduced to the basic marketing communication skills and then, they were taught how to communicate effectively in terms of the language. At that point technology came to supplement the whole marketing communication process.

Relating the Three Courses

As it has already been stated this case study is divided into three phases:

During phase I students in MKTG 291 (Marketing) are educated and trained to acquire the necessary skills to become successful marketers and sellers of products (goods and services). The course deals specifically with both the theoretical background and the practical skills, necessary to manage an organization and communicate strategically and effectively, in a discursive context, in the contemporary media context, which is part of the corporate world today. It focuses on the tasks and functions of specific communication subjects including selling, consumer behaviour, and marketing communications. It also utilizes practical methods of using these communication skills, in ways which enhance the dynamic function of a corporation in the market, while creating and maintaining a strong image for it, internally and externally.

During phase II, students are taught in BADM-231 course (Business Communication) how to communicate effectively in the English language so as to be successful marketers. Throughout the semester, the students study a number of things relating to Business Communication. However, emphasis is given on how they can design and deliver oral presentations for the purposes of the case study. Thus, at the end of the course, they are expected to present their work (presentations) for which they get an overall grade from the three lecturers whose courses constituted the basis for this result.

In phase III, where technology is involved, students of COMP-150 (Microcomputer Applications) course are introduced to Microsoft Office Applications. A part of Microsoft Office 2003 is the well-known presentation program power point. Emphasis is given on the special multimedia effects (discussed analytically in phase III) used by students to create highly professional presentations.

As it is well known technology has dynamically been involved in the processes of teaching and learning as a supplementary tool. Any educator can use it as a bridge between two or more different subjects. Thus, his/her students are enabled to receive information from both sides and at the same time learn how to use that information through technology. The figure below shows this special relationship. The course, COMP-150 links MKTG-291 and BADM-231 courses in such a way

that students are benefited from both simultaneously. At the same time both COMP-150 and BADM-231 are to be extremely useful for marketing students.
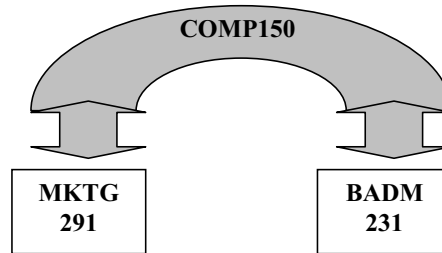

Fig. 1. The relationship between Technology, Language and Marketing

Case Study Methodology

During the semester, the lecturers worked with their students separately, but in co-operation with each other. The purpose was to teach them what they needed for their presentations and prepare them for the final project presentation for which they knew in advance that they would get a joined assessment. In particular, for this case study, one hundred and thirty marketing major students have been involved. Each one of them was asked to choose a product of his/her interest and then do some research in order to find information which would be used to advertise/present to the rest of his/her classmates and lecturers through the power point.

In general, the marketing lecturer helped students to choose the product they wanted to promote. The technology lecturer helped them to do the appropriate research in the internet (if and when needed). The English language lecturer guided them in designing/preparing the theoretical part of their presentations/speeches, and introduced them to the basic skills of actually practicing presentation techniques. Everything was ready and the technology lecturer completed the whole process by leading them into the secrets of power point in order to present their product professionally.

Finally, students were asked to present their work in front of the class and their lecturers. In addition, this research utilized industry judges to attend at these presentations in order to provide professional feedback and constructive critisism to the students. At the end of all presentations, an open discussion was held, where students, lecturers and industry practitioners interacted and exchanged ideas for students' further improvement and personal development.

Upon completion of each presentation, students were given a questionnaire for further examination of the following issues:

- ♦ Utilization of the internet as a source of information
- ♦ Degree of encouragement of using presentation software as a marketing communication tool
- ♦ Motivation in promoting a product of their choice
- ♦ Practice marketing communication skills and English language proficiency
- ♦ Examination of students' positive and negative reactions during the three phases of the project

It is well known that the use of a questionnaire provides the case investigator with both qualitative and quantitative data. Many writers agree that there are a lot to gain by combining the two case study methods of qualitative and quantitative analyses. In this case, it was found extremely useful and essential to analyze the results of our students' work by looking for answers as to why and how (qualitative) as well as what, why, and where something is happening (quantitative). The questionnaire was designed and tested first with ten participants in order to make sure that there were no problems in its use.

Case Study Results

This case study benefited the students as it motivated them firstly, to use the internet as a source of information, secondly to practice presentation software as a marketing communication tool to satisfy customer needs, and finally to practice their marketing communication skills and language proficiency. As far as the lecturers are concerned, they managed to observe students' positive and/or negative reactions during the project. At the beginning, students thought that this would be easy and that participating in it, would not demand much. Thus, they appeared de-motivated and bored. In time, however, they realized that the whole process was demanding and beneficial. Therefore, they showed more interest and enthusiasm. In fact, they followed their lecturers' instructions and did their best to meet the study's requirements.

Further, the students' responses to the questionnaire are believed to have met the objectives of this case study. Particularly, they confirmed that they were encouraged to use the Internet as a source of information to identify customer requirements. In addition, they were urged, as future marketers, to practice presentation software as a marketing communication tool to satisfy customer needs, and finally to improve their marketing communication skills and language proficiency. In general, upon completion of this case study, it was proved that language and technology constitute the basis for successful marketing communication. Thus, any student who showed real interest in improving himself/herself in the courses of BADM-231 and COMP-150, has also managed to show evidence of progress when actually performing what he/she has learnt in MKTG-291.

Almost all students showed enthusiasm throughout the semester, especially when they had actually realized what they were expected to do. They could feel the importance of combining knowledge from the three courses and putting it into practice in an attempt to achieve their major goal, which was to communicate effectively as marketers. They had come to the conclusion that promoting products is not an easy process. It was time consuming to prepare their presentations and eventually satisfy their audience by being convincing. It also took them time to feel confident enough to use both technology and the English language without hesitations.

The questions used in the questionnaire as well as the students' replies are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Questionnaire replies

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	mean
Learned how to gather information	0	20	30	40	45	3.8
Learned how to present the information	0	10	0	25	100	4.6
Learned how to spot major points for my speech	0	5	30	50	50	4.1
Encouraged me to promote effectively and efficiently	0	5	3	25	102	4.7
It was challenging and interesting	2	10	0	33	60	4.1
Technology helped me to present my ideas structured/systematically	0	5	10	25	100	4.8
It proved to be a creative process	0	10	0	20	105	4.6
It taught me a lot for my future marketing career	0	15	0	20	100	4.4
It was a modern way of delivering information on a product	0	5	15	15	100	4.6
It was time consuming	30	10	0	10	95	4.2
Learned how to satisfy my customer's needs	0	10	30	20	85	4.6
Learned how to present the product's features and benefits	0	22	0	10	103	4.4
It was motivating that we could choose a product of our choice	0	0	0	15	120	4.9
Improve my English communicative skills	0	0	30	78	27	4

Note: strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2; undecided = 3; agree = 4; strongly agree = 5.

The analysis of the results illustrated that there were no significant differences in the answers amongst the students. This proves the fact that technology worked as the perfect bridge for the other two subjects, the marketing and the English language communication. Therefore, the students benefited in the three courses equally.

In particular, the majority of students agreed and/or strongly agreed that they learned how to gather and present the information as well as spot the major points for their speech. In addition, presentation software helped them to promote their product effectively and efficiently by presenting the product's features and benefits with style and impact. The minority of students did not find the process challenging, interesting or motivating. A great number of the students agreed that technology helped them to present their ideas systematically. Almost all of them characterized the whole process creative and found this modern way of delivering information on a product beneficial for their future marketing careers. In addition, they found it time consuming and helpful to improve their English communication skills. Finally, the majority learned how to satisfy their customer's needs. They also confirmed that it was motivating because they could choose to work for a product of their own choice.

Through this analysis it is identified that the integration of technology in presenting and demonstrating a product reinforces the exercise of marketing communication skills and English language proficiency.

Meeting the Objectives

Although it is understood that case studies always run the risk of drawing conclusions which aren't one hundred percent objective it is believed that the aims and objectives of this case study were met more or less to a great extent?

Specifically, many students managed to use the internet as a source of info, practiced presentation software as a marketing communication tool to satisfy customer needs, and practiced their marketing communication skills and proficiency. As far as the lecturers are concerned, they managed to observe students' positive and/or negative reactions during the project. At the beginning, students thought that this would be easy that participating in it, wouldn't demand much. Thus, they appeared demotivated and gored. In time, however, they realized that the whole process was demanding. Therefore, they showed more interest and enthusiasm. In fact, they followed their lecturers' instructions and did their best to meet the study's requirements.

Conclusions

Through this case study it was considered to be important for marketing students to receive specific courses and special training concerning technology-based presentations skills in order to be more successful marketers. Specifically, this case study aimed to examine and evaluate the importance of language and technology that could lead to a more effective and efficient promotion of products.

This case study encouraged students to use the Internet as a source of information to identify customer requirements, urged them to practice presentation software as a marketing communication tool and enabled them to improve their marketing communication skills and language proficiency which constitute the basis for successful marketing communication.

 With this new combined learning environment, students showed enthusiasm throughout the semester as it allowed them to combine knowledge from interrelated disciplines. They realized that promoting products is not an easy process. It took a lot to prepare themselves for their presentation in a sales interview. Further the importance of technology and English language has proven to be highly important in a sales transaction and worked as a bridge for the other two subjects.

Presentation skills in the marketing and English language communication process proved to be effective in many ways. The benefits of such an application were obviously beneficial for market-

ing students in terms of selecting a product, case studying information, practicing the English language communication skills and designing a hi-tech professional and stylish presentation.

Undoubtedly technology can contribute to the process of communicating a good or a service. However, it will never subsidize the marketing people. Their role within an organization is irreplaceable. Technology will only work as a supplementary promotional tool to enrich and reinforce the overall marketing communication process.

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