

# A Reply to “Business Marketing in Master’s Programs: A Part of the Fabric”, But What If the Suit Differs?

Donald W. Barclay  
Terry H. Deutscher  
Mark H. Vandenbosch

**ABSTRACT.** In this reply to James Narus, James Anderson and Earl Honeycutt (NAH) we elaborate on the journey, a 25-year process, in teaching Business Marketing at Ivey. We further discuss the goal to elevate Business Marketing knowledge in the core of the program, rather than to build a strong specialization in the area. Inspired by NAH’s reply, we then comment on the root causes of lack of progress at some schools in bringing more Business Marketing into master’s programs, and we address the question, “What about those schools where the characteristics are different from Ivey, i.e., how far can our ideas be generalized?” doi:10.1300/J033v14n01\_07 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Donald W. Barclay is George and Mary Turnbull Professor and Associate Professor of Marketing, Terry H. Deutscher is Professor of Marketing, and Mark H. Vandenbosch holds The Magna International Inc. Chair in Business Administration and is Professor of Marketing. All three are at Richard Ivey School of Business, The University of Western Ontario.

Address correspondence to: Professor Donald W. Barclay, Richard Ivey School of Business, 1151 Richmond Street, London, ON N6A 3K7 (E-mail: [dbarclay@ivey.uwo.ca](mailto:dbarclay@ivey.uwo.ca)).

The authors are listed in alphabetical order and they contributed equally to this project.

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As authors of “Business Marketing in Master’s Programs: A Part of the Fabric” (Barclay, Deutscher, and Vandebosch 2006), we have been fortunate to receive comments on our article from three acknowledged business marketing scholars: James Narus, James Anderson, and Earl Honeycutt. In their careers, these academics have done a great deal to improve the state of knowledge about Business Marketing and the capability of our colleagues in the field to deliver relevant and successful courses.

Overall we find no significant points of disagreement with their comments. We much appreciate the constructive tone of their commentaries. In the spirit of “raising the bar” for all of us in the business marketing field, we are pleased to participate with Narus, Anderson, and Honeycutt (NAH) in a dialogue about teaching the field.

### ***CLARIFYING SOME OF OUR IDEAS***

To start with, both commentaries reflect on some of the unique dimensions of the Ivey Business School that enabled us to get to where we are, which we acknowledge as having been helpful. However, we need to comment on a couple of notions raised by NAH to ensure clarity as to who we are and what we have done. First, there are comments about Ivey focusing on Business Marketing. Though we would agree that relative to most schools, there are more professors with an interest in Business Marketing, it would be incorrect to say that Ivey has a Business Marketing focus. Our view is that if Marketing exists to facilitate exchange, then this exchange must be between the firm and some other entity. Since individuals behave and respond in fundamentally different ways than businesses and organizations, we believe this should be captured in the core curriculum. The point we would like to reinforce is our notion that Business Marketing, in our article, is not about the benefits and challenges of specializing, but about the need to inculcate this specialized knowledge into the general perspective of all MBA students. This can be done to greater or lesser extent, even in the absence of a focus on Business Marketing at a school. The challenges simply become different in kind and magnitude.

The second perspective we would like to add is that of time. Narus and Anderson (2006) do acknowledge that we did not get where we are through “one grand move.” As the three of us reflected on the commentaries, we thought it important to acknowledge that this journey has unfolded over at least 25 years. As such, it was an evolution, rather than a controlled experiment with metrics of success/failure for students and recruiters. When we looked at the marketing faculty team at Ivey over the past 25 years, we saw that the group always contained a number of individuals with an interest in Business Marketing. Net result—the journey is not a simple one, but one that, as we have argued and NAH have agreed, is worth starting or continuing.

Finally, we want to surface the point that team teaching does not imply team teaching an entire course. It may simply be a one or two of classes shared across disciplines as a way to get started. With this more limited scope, the issue of “credit” need not loom as a show stopper. Furthermore, students don’t expect a high level in interdisciplinary expertise on the part of the team-teaching faculty—but they really appreciate the breadth in perspective that two faculty members can bring to the discussion, and they often enjoy the biases that emerge.

### ***MOVING THE DIALOGUE AHEAD***

In our view, NAH have added two dimensions to the dialogue. The first is that of reflecting on the root causes for lack of progress at some schools in meeting an agreed-upon objective—inculcating more business marketing flavor into master’s programs. For example, Honeycutt (2006) points out the difficulty of finding PhD-trained business marketing faculty. Readers of these commentaries will gain a stronger sense of what they may be up against at their institution.

We note, however, that our experience at Ivey does not follow conventional thinking. Again, looking over our faculty complement for the past 25 years, we find that over 50% of those faculty members who would be viewed as “Business Marketing-friendly,” completed PhDs and researched in areas not related to Business Marketing. These other faculty were attracted to Business Marketing topics as a result of their predoctoral experience, the availability of strong teaching materials, and/or contact with B2B clients through executive development programs.

The second dimension is the raising of the overarching question: What about those schools where the characteristics are different? As

Honeycutt (2006) suggests, “master’s level programs differ around the world, as they should, to address distinct institutional goals, strategies, and markets.” Different schools have cut the cloth into different suits, so how does Business Marketing get woven into the fabric when different suits are being made? Sub-themes under this question range from, “What if there is only one business marketing faculty member?” to “What if team teaching is not supported?” to “What if because of a lack of a general management orientation, specialized faculty members are not open to incorporating a business marketing perspective?” The question then is one of how far our ideas can be generalized.

What we were delighted to see is that NAH did more than just raise the questions—they provided extensions to our thoughts that make the package of ideas more applicable across a broader range of contexts. For example, Narus and Anderson have solid suggestions on how our four pillars and the introduction of cases can speed the journey along. Honeycutt reflects on how to better integrate Business Marketing through creating the compelling need with students and through making the connections between Business Marketing and related business disciplines. Under his theme of Flexibility, he proposes questions for faculty to think about as a way to build Business Marketing into the core. These questions encourage a mindset shift, with which we agree. We are convinced that readers will have other ideas that answer the questions raised by NAH. These answers may well surface in the next review of Business Marketing in master’s programs in *JBBM* down the road.

To continue the dialogue, we focus on a fundamental situation faced by many, if not most, of the readers of this article—the so-called lone wolves that NAH describe as laboring alone in a faculty dominated by consumer marketing specialists. Unfortunately, these people work without many of the enablers we describe in our original article. By definition, they have no colleagues in business marketing, and most have little school support for the general management point of view in curriculum design or for case development efforts. In the more difficult case, where the lone wolf focuses entirely on business marketing electives and doesn’t teach a core Marketing Management course, our suggestions imply a need for some missionary work.<sup>1</sup>

Our suggestions include a number of steps. First, build a stimulating lecture on Business Marketing for use in the core course in the MBA Program. There is good background material in many of the recent texts in the area (e.g., Dwyer and Tanner, 2006, pp. 4-12). In the lecture, emphasize how standard consumer marketing approaches (e.g., segmenting on demographics, and communicating the same feature or image-based

message across the segment) will likely not work well in business marketing, where customers need customized bundles of products and services and where value is communicated uniquely to each of them. An excellent article for developing this argument is by Narayandas (2005). Make sure that the lecture has a number of interesting examples.

Second, offer to teach this lecture as a session or part of a session in the core marketing course. This can be done early in the course (if core faculty are willing), in order to present the consumer/business marketing duality as student learn about the basics of marketing. Alternatively, it can be done later in the course—perhaps as an aid to stimulate more interest in a Business Marketing elective.

Third, work with your School or University's alumni group to identify a graduate from the past 10-15 years who has been successful in a company with organizational customers. Invite this person to speak in a class on a topic such as "The Role of Marketing in Industry X," or "What they don't Teach you about Marketing in the MBA Program." Before the guest appearance, provide some coaching on what you want to accomplish in the class—opening people's eyes to the potential of Business Marketing.

Finally, consider working with your School or University's Placement or Career Management office to identify a few recent graduates who are working in a Business Marketing setting. Organize a panel discussion for a session in the core Marketing course or alternatively an afternoon or evening session in conjunction with your school's Marketing Club.

Building Business Marketing into the fabric of master's business education is a long-term project that requires significant effort on the part of Business Marketing faculty. In lone-wolf situations, this task may seem daunting. However, we hope that our paper and NAH's thoughtful commentaries will stimulate more thinking and discussion which will take us all to a goal that we all share—an improved Business Marketing offering in our master's programs. We look forward to the continued dialogue.

#### NOTE

1. Many of these ideas would also apply to the easier situation, only there the sole practitioner of Business Marketing can try the ideas out in his/her own core course first.

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