

A Reply to Commentaries
by Gul T. Butaney and Carlos M. Rodriguez–
The Business Marketing Course:
A Cornerstone
in the Undergraduate Curriculum

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Gul T. Butaney (2006) and Carlos M. Rodriguez (2006) provide thoughtful and constructive commentary on our article, “Undergraduate Business Marketing Education: Exploring the Collaborative Skills of High-Performing Marketing Managers” (Hutt and Speh 2006a). Both authors affirm our core position that the business marketing course is ideally suited to provide students with a well-rounded view of the managerial work of marketing, particularly the collaborative skill-set that successful marketing managers have mastered. To expand the collaborative content, we believe that greater attention can be given to the important cross-functional roles that marketing managers perform by managing through people—namely leading, linking, and integrating strategies and customer solutions (Mintzberg 1994). By shifting the focus from the functional area to the individual, the analysis brings to life the realities that marketing managers and account managers face in working across units, reconciling diverse interests, securing resources, or coordinating actions to solve the problem of a key customer or alliance partner. Of course, some managers are more effective than others in performing this challenging interdisciplinary role. To that end, we explored the characteristics of reputationally effective managers and

offered a portrait of the collaborative skills that are instrumental to job performance in the business marketing context.

To prosper in the new era of business marketing, Butaney (2006) argues that the collaborative skill set of managers becomes a determinant of success while Rodriguez proposes, in a spirited discussion, that the development of relational skills and competencies should constitute the core element of the educational model for all business school graduates.

TRENDS IN BUSINESS MARKETING PRACTICE

Leading business marketing firms succeed by providing superior value to customers and by satisfying the special requirements of even the most demanding customers. As Butaney (2006) observes, many of these firms create what might be called a “collaborative advantage” by demonstrating special skills in managing relationships with key customers or by jointly creating innovative offerings with alliance partners (Kanter 1994). These firms have learned how to become a good partner, and these superior relational competencies are a valuable asset in the business market. To this end, we are in full agreement with his position that (1) relationship management issues constitute the heart of the business marketing course and that (2) knowledge of superior influence strategies and conflict resolution methods is fundamental to successful alliance management. In turn, Butaney (2006) also highlights the importance of customer knowledge—particularly, understanding the customer’s business and industry—to relationship marketing success. We would add that special attention should also be given to choosing the right customers, highlighting differences in the cost-to-serve, profit potential, cultural fit, and the learning possibilities that potential customers might present.

Butaney (2006) offers a host of valuable course design suggestions for deepening the collaborative component of the business marketing course. We particularly like his suggestion that instructors provide an in-class demonstration of collaborative software tools, such as CRM, and know some instructors who regularly include such sessions in their course. Moreover, to trace the development of business relationship for students, he also proposes teaming a guest speaker from a customer organization (i.e., a buyer) with a counterpart from a marketing firm (i.e., a seller) or key personnel representing an alliance relationship. Additionally, small caselets from successful and unsuccessful partnerships might be used, allowing students to explore key milestones in a relationship and to draw conclusions about the root causes of the outcome.

A “VALUES” DRIVEN PERSPECTIVE

Carlos Rodriguez (2006) proposes several new directions that faculty members can apply in creating a business curriculum that sustains a values-driven perspective. To this end, he notes that educational encounters “should allow for students to discover, capture, internalize, rank, judge, and communicate values as new learning advances” (Rodriguez 2006, p. 2). We concur with the critical nature and implicit objective of each of the five dimensions of business education described by Rodriguez. However, we believe that these elements constitute the core of a broad-based business education and they apply to every discipline within the field of business. For example, systems-thinking is a fundamental conceptual perspective that is explored in several courses in the business curriculum under the banner of “processes.” Moreover, an education based on values, particularly one that considers the moral and ethical as well as the financial consequences of business decisions, represents a critical priority across the business school curriculum. As a next step, Rodriguez might explore these themes more directly in the context of the business marketing course, for example, by considering the way in which a values-driven perspective might be addressed in a customer relationship management module.

The commentaries by Butaney (2006) and Rodriguez (2006) complement our article and contribute to the business marketing education literature by providing additional course content and design recommendations to strengthen the collaborative skills of business school graduates. In turn, their commentaries reveal the unique place that the business marketing course occupies in the undergraduate curriculum.

A CONCLUDING NOTE

Filling a gap in the undergraduate marketing curriculum defined our purpose in developing a business marketing text twenty-five years ago and the distinctive value that a business marketing education provides to students continues to inform and motivate these efforts (Hutt and Speh 2006b). First, the content and focus of the business marketing course are closely aligned with the critical themes in business practice, striking a responsive chord with practitioners and campus recruiters. Examine the roster of companies that regularly recruit at most universities and you will find that it is dominated by business marketing firms, large and small. These recruiters place a premium on those marketing

students who understand business markets, organizational buying processes, and the drivers of customer profitability. Since most entry-level positions for marketing undergraduates are in business-to-business sales, a distinctive area of specialization can be developed by augmenting the business marketing course with personal selling and sales management course electives. Second, as our article and the related commentaries demonstrate, the business marketing course provides the ideal platform for providing students not only with analytical skills, but also with a broader set of relational skills that are aligned with the managerial work that marketing managers perform. Third, the business marketing course squarely serves the needs of students by deepening their knowledge of the competitive realities of the global marketplace, high-technology markets, customer relationship management, and marketing strategy development, thereby enhancing their decision-making capabilities in this vital area of marketing.

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