

Making Business Marketing More Prominent in Master's Programs: Reply to Earl D. Honeycutt, Jr.

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We would like to thank Professor Honeycutt (Honeycutt 1998) for his thoughtful comments on our article (Narus and Anderson 1998). As he implies, we wrote this article to begin a debate as to the scope and future of business marketing education at the master's level rather than as the final word on its current state-of-practice. In this reply, we add several reflections on business marketing that we have gleaned from discussions with our colleagues as well as respond to a few issues that Professor Honeycutt raises. Most importantly, we use our limited space to strongly urge those in the discipline to actively promote business marketing to master's level students and educators alike.

First and foremost, we would like to point out that graduate-student employment trends demand that business schools place greater emphasis on business marketing. From 1995 to 1997, between 28% and 32% of all U.S. master's level students took jobs with consulting firms (*HR Focus* 1996; *Management Consultant International* 1997). Not

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only do consultancies offer a significant number of job openings, they pay the highest starting salaries and give the largest “signing bonuses” (Morgenstern and McCaffery 1996). Pundits claim that these factors have caused applications to master’s level programs to skyrocket in recent years and have enabled business schools to overcome the enrollment crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Miller 1995). Furthermore, it is our observation that although management consulting firms serve clients in all industries, a disproportionately large percentage of their clients serve business markets rather than consumer markets. For these reasons, a course in business marketing should be of paramount interest to the increasing number of students who aspire to be consultants.

While consulting opportunities are blossoming, master’s level students are finding fewer jobs available in advertising agencies and brand management, the traditional employers of consumer marketing specialists. For example, experts contend that major U.S. advertising agencies have almost given up on master’s level students and now prefer to hire undergraduates (Farrell 1997). At the same time, many consumer product companies are eliminating brand management positions, downgrading the responsibilities of remaining brand managers, or replacing them with category managers (Richards 1997). Category managers spend far more time sustaining working relationships with super-retailers like Wal-Mart, Home Depot, and Safeway, managing logistics and inventory, and providing support services to resellers than brand managers ever did. We contend that students are more likely to learn requisite category management skills in a business marketing course than in a brand management course. As Professor Honeycutt urges, we believe that the discipline must actively trumpet the career opportunities and benefits of learning business marketing to master’s level students.

We provide the following responses to issues Professor Honeycutt raises. Professor Honeycutt cautions that researchers not mix research findings with opinions of the researchers. We have no problem interspersing research findings with observations of the researchers as long as the source is readily apparent to the reader, which we made a special effort to do in our article.

One of the key points we make in the article is that educators must expand the scope of their business marketing courses to include contemporary management topics such as business process re-engineer-

ing, working relationships and business networks, and cross-functional coordination. Unlike Professor Honeycutt, we do not believe that practitioners consider these business practices to be fads. Instead, we observe firms have used them to provide superior performance at lower-cost. Firms have not abandoned these concepts and practices. Rather, they continue to use them as a foundation upon which they are building new sources of competitive advantage. In addition, regardless of whether these concepts are fads or not, our graduates must know something about them when they are asked by recruiters and future employers.

We agree that scholars must conduct further research to determine such things as the number of faculty members willing and able to teach business marketing, the type of universities that offer business marketing, and the extent to which schools give credit to faculty members for writing cases. However, we are not as sanguine about the likelihood that researchers can gather a *large* sample of respondents. Based on our telephone survey and Internet search, we doubt that more than one hundred accredited U.S. universities offer business marketing at the master's level. As to Professor Honeycutt's query concerning class sizes in our sample, the median number of students per business marketing class during the 1996-97 school year was 30 and the mean was 33.

We did in fact draw upon the mailing list of the Business-to-Business Marketing Special Interest Group (B2B SIG) of the American Marketing Association. And we point out that the B2B SIG runs its own Internet web site, the *B2B Marketing Exchange* (www.mba.wfu.edu/mba/b2b.htm). However, as with other web sites, the Exchange must function with limited resources and topical materials.

Contrary to what Professor Honeycutt states, we did not and do not advocate a single textbook for business marketing. Rather, we found that nearly half of respondents to our survey did not use a textbook, and observed that a widely-used, authoritative and innovative textbook does not appear to exist. This void makes it more difficult and time-consuming for less-experienced faculty members to prepare new courses in business marketing. In addition, there is no standard reference source for those outside the discipline to turn to when they need to know something about business marketing.

In retrospect, we may have overstated the credit universities should afford professors for writing cases. However, we maintain that a well-

written case study does make a contribution to the discipline, and that this should be acknowledged more than it has. We also emphasize that academics write far fewer business marketing cases each year than consumer product cases, and that they have not focused enough attention on professional service industries or contemporary business marketing issues.

Finally, we cannot disagree with Professor Honeycutt that professors with experience in business marketing bring significantly more to the classroom. In an ideal world, everyone who taught business marketing would have significant work experience in the discipline. However, we find few new marketing professors who do. Thus, to grow the discipline of business marketing, we need to reach out to those marketing professors who have some interest in business marketing but who may not have experience in it. Widely-known, "user-friendly" teaching materials in business marketing, and an active network of business marketing academics and practitioners to draw on will encourage and help those interested marketing professors to develop graduate courses in business marketing.

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