

# Linking Content to Practice in the Business Marketing Course: A Reply to Gul Butaney

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Gul Butaney (1998) provides thoughtful and constructive commentary on our article, "Business Marketing Education: A Distinctive Role in the Undergraduate Curriculum" (Hutt and Speh 1998a). The author affirms our core position that the business marketing course provides an ideal platform for exposing students to fundamental changes that are occurring in business practice. Moreover, the commentary lends support to the particular trends in practice that we chose as most deserving of special coverage in the business marketing course. To this end, Butaney (1998) explores these trends in business practice by using more broadly defined labels: strategic trends in purchasing and supplier relations management; relationship marketing; high-technology product marketing; faster, better and friendlier product development; and cross-functional integration. The commentary complements our article and contributes to the business marketing education literature by providing additional course content and design recommendations that respond to each of these trends.

## *STRATEGIC TRENDS IN PURCHASING*

In many firms, purchasing strategy is becoming more closely tied to corporate strategy (Spekman, Stewart, and Johnston 1995). Organiza-

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tions are focusing on core competencies and relying on key suppliers as a source for product and process technology to continuously improve performance. For the purchasing function, this reflects a shift away from a tactical perspective (for example, cost savings) to a more strategic orientation (for example, forging relationships with those suppliers that can enhance the value of the firm's offerings) (Moncka and Trent 1995). As purchasing adopts a more strategic orientation, we endorse Butaney's (1998) position that the business marketing course should give careful attention to the reasons, motivations, and specific values that customer organizations seek in entering close working relationships with suppliers. To achieve this goal, the business marketing course should isolate the role of purchasing in the firm, explore the tools of analysis that purchasing managers employ (for example, value analysis and vendor analysis), examine the rich information environment that supports vendor evaluation, and assess the complex influence patterns that encircle organizational buying decisions. The commentary provides several valuable suggestions for bringing purchasing tools—like electronic data interchange (EDI) systems—to life in the classroom.

### ***RELATIONSHIP MARKETING***

By demonstrating superior skills in managing relationships with key customers as well as with alliance partners, business marketers can create a competitive advantage. Butaney (1998) argues that a relationship marketing perspective provides the foundation for the business marketing course because relational issues surround nearly every element of strategy. We agree. To develop responsive and profitable relationship marketing strategies, special attention must be given to (1) segmenting the market, (2) selecting specific customers to target in each segment, (3) developing account-specific offerings, (4) implementing relationship strategies, and (5) evaluating relationship outcomes.

Consistent with Cespedes (1995), Butaney (1998) argues that successful relationship strategies place more emphasis on the firm's ability to generate timely market knowledge by individual customer account. Some valuable suggestions are offered for a dedicated class session on the design of customer service strategies and customer

satisfaction measurement systems. We believe that these topics fit nicely into a course module that can be organized around the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton 1996; Hutt and Speh 1998b).

### ***HIGH-TECHNOLOGY PRODUCT MARKETING***

The business marketing course can fill a gap in the marketing curriculum by examining the unique challenges and opportunities that high-technology products and markets present. Butaney (1998) outlines several areas where the Internet is assuming a more prominent role in business marketing programs. We would add a wealth of other content areas where Internet-based applications and strategies might be incorporated into the course. These applications include the use of the Internet for competitive analysis, market research, post-sale communications with customers, self-service technical support and customer training, as well as marketing communications and public relations (Moore, Johnson, and Kippola 1998). Quelch and Klein (1996, p. 74) argue that a “company must assess who its diverse Web audiences are, what specific customer needs the medium will satisfy, and how its Internet presence will respond to a changing customer base, evolving customer needs, competitor actions, and technological developments.”

### ***FASTER, BETTER AND FRIENDLIER PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT***

Rather than providing a comprehensive inventory of topics that might be covered in the business marketing course, we chose instead to isolate important themes from practice—such as fast-cycle product development—and to explore the resulting implications for course design. As Butaney (1998) suggests, the new product development area also provides a vehicle for exploring the barriers to new product success as well as the complex ecological issues that emerge in the new product development process.

### ***CROSS-FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION***

Managing conflict, promoting cooperation, and developing coordinated strategies are all fundamental to the business marketer’s inter-

disciplinary role. By understanding the concerns and orientations of personnel from other functional areas, the business marketing manager is better equipped to forge effective cross-unit relationships and fulfill the needs of customers (Hutt and Speh 1998b). Butaney (1998) suggests that the business marketing course should devote special attention to the composition, performance measurement, and the forces that motivate and divide multifunctional teams. Such an approach has merit in illuminating the challenging interdisciplinary role that a marketing manager performs. Like Butaney (1998), we believe that managing relationships with other functions, with alliance partners, with channel members, and with customers constitutes a major component of the managerial work of a business marketing manager.

### A CONCLUDING NOTE

A review of our article and the related commentary reveals that fundamental topics like supply chain management, organizational buying behavior, relationship marketing, cross-functional integration, and related strategy areas constitute the common ground of the business marketing course. A diverse portfolio of approaches can be employed by the instructor to bring these concepts to life and to expand the knowledge and skills of students. Butaney (1998) highlights the unique place that the business marketing course occupies within the business school curriculum and offers a rich set of suggestions for designing the undergraduate course.

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