

Investigating the place of traditional sales skills education in a direct marketing context: Have we entered the age of the Integrated Marketing Maven?

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This paper extends knowledge in how to teach undergraduate students using state-of-the-art professional selling skill techniques and science when formulating integrated, interactive marketing strategies. It will first examine the relationship of selling skills education to success in traditional direct marketing job needs and how to prepare students to become more proficient direct marketers by buttressing their education with professional selling skills. This paper will influence the practice of professional direct marketing and will influence the teaching of direct/interactive and social media marketing. It is about marketing pedagogy, use of current/emerging technology in the classroom, cross-channel/multi-channel marketing and integrated marketing communications (IMC).

Marketers are challenged today because of the multi-channel media avenues available to attract new business and to manage customer relationship marketing. Because of new behavioral processes with the rise in the use of mobile and social media by their targets, marketers are uncertain how to deliver messages and how to formulate messages to encourage prospects and customers to respond to their offerings. Professional selling techniques are very closely aligned with the direct marketing techniques of the “offer” and “creative” when asking a customer to take action, the “call to order” or “call to action” in direct marketing.

This paper shows new insights that heretofore have not been found in the literature about the uniqueness of combining direct marketing education with professional sales skill education. Have we entered the age of the Integrated Marketing Maven?

We have been investigating which sales skills are important for direct marketers. Anecdotal evidence has shown that while direct marketing companies tend to hire graduates who have completed direct/integrated marketing courses, a significant number of the entry-level positions are in “inside sales” jobs, often at the direct marketing telemarketing call center. Also, the formulation of the “offer” and the “call to action” in a direct marketing or social marketing context is closely related to “closing the sale” in a professional selling context that similar skills are needed to formulate the proper word smithing of copy for the offer, call to action or the closing of the sale. So we now investigate the place of traditional sales skills education in a direct marketing context. We want to know whether having these skills do actually improve performance of entry-level professionals over those with direct marketing skills only. We also investigate whether the combination of direct marketing and traditional sales skills creates a “super sales professional” who excels in all direct marketing environments—a sort of “jack-of-all-trades” rather than a specialist. We interview both graduates who are in first three years of a career at direct marketing companies as well as their managers at those companies. We define the skills needed for success and how to develop curriculum to meet that success requirement.

This paper shows the teaching process and the results of the studies.