

and precipitate a return to postmodern primitivism. The exfoliators are thus exfoliated, as Karl Marx almost said.

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The Marketplace Game

Innovative Learning Solutions Inc.
www.marketplace-simulation.com

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Most *JAMS* readers will be aware of the fact that business games or simulations have been widely used for a number of years. We doubt, however, that very many of you knew that, as early as 1961, an academic conference had been held on the use of “Business Games as Teaching Devices” (Dill, Jackson, and Sweeney 1969). By 1963, one can find a contribution by Kuehn and Day in Alderson and Shapiro’s *Marketing and the Computer*, which first provides a historical overview on simulation and gaming as of that time period and then briefly discusses the Carnegie Tech Marketing Game. Included in the same volume is one of Hans Thorelli’s (1963) first discussions of INTOP, the International Business Operations Game, then being developed at the University of Chicago.

Over the years and decades that followed, Dr. Thorelli continued to focus much of his time and energy to the further development of INTOP. A large number of other games and simulations were developed during the same four decades. Some have come and gone, but others have subsequently both been refined any number of times and technologically adjusted as computer technology continued to evolve. For use in either the Introductory Marketing or Marketing Strategy courses, one now finds a range of possibilities including, but by no means limited to, *The Marketing Game*, *PharmaSim*, *Markstrat*, and the focus of our attention, *Marketplace*.

As is true with the textbooks that compete for our business, directly competing marketing simulations almost certainly will be viewed by prospective adopters as having very different relative strengths and weaknesses. When a textbook choice is being made, a comparative examination should be made both of long established offerings and of newly published first editions. The same holds true when a marketing simulation is being selected for course use. Unfortunately, to the best of our knowledge, no unbiased comparative assessment of both the above-mentioned marketing simulations and of their competitors is available to help you make that choice. What follows will not be an effort to fill that important gap. Comparative analysis is a task that must be undertaken by someone who has used a variety of these simulations in a classroom setting. We can only discuss in a knowledgeable way our own experiences

using *Marketplace*, a game we have employed with great success in a number of different marketing courses.

For a detailed and, understandably, positive overview of *Marketplace*, readers are referred to the sponsoring organization’s home page, www.marketplace-simulation.com. As might be expected, they will find there lists of adopting schools and corporations and testimonials from both instructors and satisfied student users. Readers would also have learned, had they gone to the Web site in July 2002, when this review was written, that there were then six already fully operational versions of *Marketplace* available to users as well as an e-commerce version scheduled for “beta testing” in the fall of 2002. What the Web site does not highlight is the fact that *Marketplace* is a project first developed and now continually being refined by Dr. Ernie Cadotte, a professor of marketing at the University of Tennessee.

Four of the six currently operational versions of *Marketplace* are full-scale business simulations, differing in length and complexity but all requiring a significant student focus not only on marketing but on the other functional areas of business as well. Presumably, such material would be used primarily in either an in-house professional development setting or in degree-level capstone business policy or strategy courses. In addition, there is available both an Introduction to Marketing or (Marketing Principles) and a Marketing Strategy version of the game, where less emphasis is placed on the other functional areas of management. For both marketing versions, users play via Web-Access at a fixed cost per student, with all processing being provided by a host computer in Knoxville, Tennessee.

All of our experience with *Marketplace* has involved the use of either the Marketing Principles or Marketing Strategy versions of this simulation. That experience, however, has been fairly extensive, involving use in a traditional face-to-face setting, in an entirely online course, and in a combination or “mixed-mode” course. In one of our classes, teams of students competed in a *Marketplace*-sponsored international competition against teams from many other universities. A colleague of ours also used the *Strategy* game successfully while offering a weekend executive MBA-level “short course” in Paris. At various times, we have had individual students competing against each other, four- or five-person student teams competing against each other, and—the approach we have found most successful in “entirely online” courses—student teams competing against computer-generated rivals. (The computer-generated rival option is not currently available to those using the other four “business strategy” versions of the game.)

All of our applications have been Web based, with the necessary processing being done by the simulation’s developer, Innovative Learning Solutions Inc. In other

words, we opted for outsourcing the actual operation of the game to those prepared to provide a complete turnkey operation. Many will find such outsourcing a tremendous step forward in that now an instructor with limited technical expertise and no technical in-house support can still easily incorporate a simulation in a marketing class. (As far as we know, the *Marketplace* simulation was among the very first to offer such an option, although it is now being provided by an increasing number of competitors.)

We have been quite pleased from the very beginning with the level of technical support provided to both instructors and students by the *Marketplace* support staff. Of even more significance to other potential adopters, however, is the fact that, because of continuous fine-tuning of the Web offering, we have had during recent semesters progressively less need to call upon that technical support. Indeed, during the spring of 2002, all of the technical glitches were due to student errors in registration or submitting data. In every case, *Marketplace* support staff talked our students through these problems while keeping us informed as to the progress being made in correcting them.

Perhaps our most interesting use of the *Marketplace* Marketing Strategy version is as but one of six grade components in an entirely online MBA 1 marketing course, which in turn is but one of eight courses in the entirely online Simon Fraser University (SFU) graduate diploma in business administration. Other components of the final grade in that course include (1) an exam written by each student in the form of a “key marketing concepts of value to us” memo addressed to a CEO, (2) an original marketing plan, (3) a requirement that each student team both analyze two cases and critique the analysis of case analyses made by two other teams, (4) required student responses to posted “Marketing Management in Practice” discussion questions (“How does the new product process actually used in your firm compare to what’s recommended in the text?”), and (5) short videos (“What, if anything of value did you learn from the video about . . . ?”).

The text used for the graduate diploma in business administration (GDBA) marketing is the Canadian version of Perreault’s Basic Marketing, and the videos and powerpoints are those supporting both the U.S. and Canadian versions of that text. The course in question involves 13 weeks of student assignments and a 2-week examination period. The Marketing Strategy version of *Marketplace* runs for eight rounds, with team submissions due at the end of Weeks 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11. The students enrolled in the course will have anywhere from 2 to 10 years of business experience. About half the students enrolled in the program will subsequently go on to enter the 2nd year either of SFU’s Management of Technology

MBA or its specialist MBA. (For more information on this online marketing course and, perhaps, a visit to it, interested readers need only e-mail me at sshapiro@sfu.ca.)

The course description appearing above makes it clear that there is no margin for error or delay in the administration of the game or for bugs in program design. But as has also already been suggested, the Marketing Strategy version now runs entirely online in a smooth and (almost) trouble-free version. What problems there are usually involve students trying to shortcut the initial registration process.

Very desirable features of this simulation include the following:

- A game designed with a global focus; five discrete market segments; and where the industry, computers, is one to which almost all students can relate. The scenario involves a mix of industrial and consumer marketing in that students, while not selling directly to the end user, must still conduct consumer research to develop an appropriate mix for selling to market intermediaries.
- An equal focus in game design as well on both the customary strategic (which target markets?) and tactical (i.e., which advertising appeals and with which degree of prominence?) issues. Important tactical brand design decisions must also be made regarding the choice of product features. Many other marketing simulations have either a tactical focus or a strategic focus.
- Complete instructor flexibility in scheduling both with regard to due dates and the length of time student teams have to make their eight quarterly decisions—except if your class is playing against teams from other institutions. Intercollegiate scheduling became a problem for us, however, only for the one class that was being offered on a quarter, rather than a semester, system.
- Computer-generated rivals, an option that greatly simplifies online use, in that the failure of one team to meet a deadline does not hold up half the class. However, we have also come to prefer the computer-generated option in face-to-face classes. This form of competition encourages camaraderie rather than rivalry in the classroom and focuses student attention on the specifics of the game rather than on efforts to obtain information from, or about, competing teams.
- Automatic and almost immediate processing of each round as long as the submitting student team has correctly “wrapped up” (submitted) its own decision package. The decision-making and wrap-up

procedure also makes it easy for team members to collaborate and or critique the recommendation of colleagues before the actual submission of results.

- A set of powerpoints that very effectively cover “the hows, the whys, and the wherefores” of the *Marketplace* simulation. These powerpoints were designed for on-site instructor use, but we have provided them online to our students through our course delivery and management system, currently Web-CT.
- A very complete and educationally solid “student help” component that guides students through the decisions required in each quarter and, in the course of doing so, also reinforces the relevance of key marketing concepts. This is available to students at the *Marketplace* Web site.
- A quite reasonable (as of fall 2002, U.S.\$28.00 per student for the *Strategy Game* when playing against the computer and U.S.\$40.00 when playing against other student teams) per player pricing system. This eliminates the need to purchase (or, more likely, convince some budget administrator to purchase) an expensive site license.

Who (or what simulation) among us is perfect? *Marketplace's* Marketing Strategy Game as played by our students in the summer of 2002 could have used a little further fine-tuning. We have found, for example, that the designer's concern with team security for groups competing one against another resulted in our students (who play against the computer) requiring an excess of passwords and registration numbers. However, our comments, and perhaps those of other adopters, have resulted in the registration process as of fall 2002 being appreciably simplified.

It is also currently impossible for a co-instructor or teaching assistant to gain access to the game without using the instructor's password. We have, in addition, found that some of the student teams that were outperformed by computer-generated rivals would cite instances in which these rival teams seemed to be “bending the rules.” Especially eager students also ask why all of the markets in the same global region are assumed to be generating the same advertising and pricing response scores. The relative weights assigned to the various components of what eventually becomes each team's overall Marketing Effectiveness score have also been questioned.

A recently corrected problem involved the inability of “online” team members simultaneously assessing the game from different locations to work concurrently in such respective areas of responsibility as product design, sales force deployment, advertising, and pricing. Previously, this was not possible, but the recent provision of separate work sites facilitates concurrent team member evaluation of alternatives. However, only one “online”

team member at a time can access the data entry page to enter (or review) the team's final marketing mix decisions for each quarter. Also, reviewing decisions in previous quarters with regard to advertising appeals, sales force allocation, and product design is now a somewhat cumbersome process. Such reviews would be facilitated if the details of past decisions made each quarter in these areas were presented in the following quarter's summary section.

Another minor irritation follows from the fact that the same quarterly results and effectiveness measures are presented in two different locations. This can both concern and confuse students until they realize what is happening. Then they just ask, Why the unnecessary repetition? The only possible issue with regard to the now otherwise faultless level of technical support is the fact that such support is not regularly available on weekends. Although we have not found this to be a problem, initial adopters might wish to schedule student team submissions for week nights (Monday-Thursday) or Sunday night.

In our opinion, the drawbacks we have just cited are far less significant than the many positive features we previously mentioned. Overall, we have been very satisfied with every aspect of our *Marketplace* experience. Just as important, our students, almost unanimously, indicate they found the game an exciting and realistic experience. Among other things, they speak of this simulation “breathing life” into the course and providing a “real feel” for decision making in marketing. It is also felt the type of team learning that takes place is very different from that generated through case analysis.

We believe any one planning to use a simulation (and we would encourage you to explore that possibility in an introductory bachelor of business administration (BBA) or MBA-level marketing course) should definitely include both the Marketing Principles and Marketing Strategy versions of *Marketplace* in the “short list” of simulations from which a final choice will eventually be made. The Marketing Strategy version also deserves very serious consideration when a simulation is being chosen at the strategy course level. But, as we have mentioned earlier, competing simulations on that short list will also have desirable features.

Both instructional needs and instructor interests differ between schools and between programs. One of the other existing simulations, perhaps one exclusively focused on consumer marketing, might better meet your needs and interests. What is really important is that those of us who, for one reason or another, have rejected the use of simulations in the past reexamine that decision in light of what is now currently available; technologically possible; and, thanks to the Internet and outsourcing, administratively so very simple.

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The Future of Marketing: Practical Strategies for Marketers in the Post-Internet Age

By Cor Molenaar
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There is likely little doubt that the shelves of bookstores globally are filled with a plethora of practitioner-oriented books extolling the virtues of the Internet as *the* technological revolution that will forever change how businesses conduct their operations. Many of these texts read as if the Internet is the "magic bullet" that every executive has been looking for to reach customers faster and cheaper than ever imagined.

Examples of zealous organizations that quickly adopted magic bullet Internet-based strategies masked as customer relationship management (e-CRM), e-business, and so on are not hard to find these days, given the abundance of literature on dot com crashes and return-on-investment expectations of these new technologies. Given the rapid expansion of the Internet and the haunting stories of organizational failure to achieve targeted objectives with the Internet, it is no wonder why there are so many academic skeptics (at least this is the case for this reviewer) who are wary of books promising that the new future of marketing lies with the use of the Internet. Having said that, Molenaar's book is a refreshing change from many others that are on the market. However, to be privy to its revitalizing nature, you have to be prepared to read the book through to the end, as there are patterns of shifting focus from application of the technology through to the organizational changes required to optimize on these new innovations.

Molenaar sets the mind of the critic at ease early in the book by stressing that the Internet and all of the "e" words, and technological opportunities that go with it, do not

constitute a revolution but more of an evolution. Key phrases such as "A vogue word does not imply a revolution" (pg. xxiii) and "technology facilitates change" (pg. XXV) grab the interest of the academic reader and the practitioner (who perhaps is trying to avoid the common pitfalls of the new technology opportunities) as they appear to set the stage for what is to be bestowed upon the reader in the 227 pages ahead.

There is a clear shift in focus from the introduction to the first and several following chapters. Although the prevailing theme that Internet opportunities require organizational mind-set changes is clear throughout the book, the reader follows a bit of a roller-coaster ride of organizational requirements and technology application through the first several chapters. While this approach does have merit in that it attempts to integrate the two concepts, it does run the risk of reiterating much of the extant literature on the use of technology as a competitive advantage, at the expense of the key message that these technologies will not be useful without the proper organizational culture behind them.

It likely goes without saying that every book has its strengths and weaknesses, and this book is no exception. There are two key weaknesses with this book that may become evident to both academics and practitioners. First, if Molenaar's key message is to distill in the reader that technology is evolutionary in the marketing process rather than revolutionary, then his valiant effort to integrate in each chapter the need to understand the application of the technological opportunities with the requirements for organizational change to support those opportunities seems to dilute this message. Second, for those of us who are engaged in the definitional battle of marketing constructs argued in academic journals, Molenaar's continual use of phrases such as "market orientation," "marketing orientation," "customer orientation," and "customer focus" may cause distress as you progress through the book. However, as this book is likely targeted toward practitioners, this weakness may be, as they say, purely academic.

The Future of Marketing does have some very significant strengths that apply to both academics and practitioners. First, the book does offer easy-to-understand explanations of the technology and of its application within the organization. To those of us who struggle with the e-jargon, this is very helpful. Second, Molenaar provides an excellent chapter summary of the contents and key learning material for each chapter. This alone makes the book a worthwhile purchase for those that want to increase their knowledge in this field but do not have the time to read the book in its entirety. Finally, the last two chapters of the book stress that the technology is indeed evolutionary, as Molenaar stated in the introduction, and that in order for an organization to successfully adapt these