



Marketing Messages

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SFU, GM get good mileage out of business project

Take a group of University students, a car, and the knowledge and ingenuity to pull off a promotional stunt and what do you get? If you're thinking of UBC engineers hanging a Volkswagen off the Lions Gate Bridge, try again. Think business. Think "The Apprentice". Think SFU.

This fall students at **Simon Fraser University** in Burnaby, got to tackle a real marketing challenge with a real budget, real customers and a real client. The class of fourth year business administration students worked in teams "Apprentice style" for a client every bit as demanding as Trump himself. The twist? Nobody got fired, and everyone increased their chance of being hired in the marketing field based on their experience.

They were participants in the **General Motors Marketing Internship Program** facilitated by program administrator, **EdVenture Partners**. This is GM's second year participating in the Canadian program, having been involved for 15 years in the US. EdVenture Partners, launched 15 years ago in the US, is the bridge between academic institutions and corporate business. The goal of the program is to take the academic business model and apply it to the real world. "We've worked with 400 colleges and Universities in Canada and the US and have had 35,000 students go through our program since we started", notes EdVenture CEO, Tony Sgrow. To date, ten schools in Canada have participated. Simon Fraser is the first University in BC to be involved.

The class was divided into teams to tackle strategy, research, advertising, public relations, finance and project coordination. Together their work simulated that of an advertising agency for the client. The challenge was to take a budget of \$3,200 and use it creatively to increase the awareness of the Chevrolet Aveo. The process they followed is a great template for approaching a promotional marketing event.

1. **They did their research.** They conducted qualitative and quantitative research through focus groups and self completed questionnaires with a diverse representation of students on campus. Things such as awareness and perception of the Aveo brand, awareness and perception of competing brands, and a measure of attributes that influence purchase decisions were measured before and after the event. Preliminary research indicated that the Aveo had a relatively low level of awareness and that Asian imports were favoured over the GM brand. Price and reliability were identified as key attributes of importance.

2. **They developed a strategy for the event.** The goal for the promotion was to increase the awareness and stimulate a positive perception of the Aveo on campus. To accomplish this, they set out to put "600 cheeks in seats" to get students to experience the spacious and stylish interior of the car. The theme for the campaign became, "MORE than you think". They created a single day event that featured live music, free food, and a contest. For each person who sat in the car, a package of Kraft Dinner was donated to the SFU and Greater Vancouver Food Banks.

3. **They made an advertising plan.** Pre-event advertising included campus banners, posters, in-class presentations, flyers, website exposure, an email campaign, and cheeky t-shirts worn by the class for the week prior featuring two cars strategically placed across the chest with the words, "MORE than you think. On event day they had more banners, sandwich board people, flyers, Aveo display cars throughout campus and projector screens with information, Aveo commercials and a live slideshow of the event. They made contest winner information and event photos available on a website. They calculated expected impressions to measure exposure.

4. **They developed a public relations plan.** Their budget was tight, so they made a strategic effort to cultivate publicity before, during and after the event. They identified media outlets to approach and key contacts. Utilizing the strength of their association with SFU, they had the first set of press releases sent via the University's PR Department.

5. **They had financial plan.** At \$3,200 the budget wasn't big, and they accounted for every last penny. They also sought sponsorships and donations to create more value.

6. **They had contingency plans.** They addressed controlled and anticipated problems and put a plan in place for each scenario.

The results? On November 9th, more than 684 students sat in the Chevrolet Aveo, and 700 items of Kraft Dinner were donated to the SFU and Greater Vancouver Food Banks. Class members working at Ipsos-Reid as part-time coop students conducted the research analysis. Their post event research indicated 40% of 17,000 students on campus were aware of the campaign. Most importantly the awareness of the Aveo brand had doubled, and they were able to show a positive shift in perception of key attributes such as reliability. On November 30th the students got to present their findings to the client, General Motors and senior faculty.

The project, based on curriculum based pier marketing, at first glance appears to offer companies such as GM an exclusive and valuable low cost method to access and persuade a valuable segment of their target market. It certainly challenges school administrators to strike the proper balance for the sponsoring business's involvement in curriculum development. In fact, EdVenture Partners CEO Tony Sgrow freely admits the environment for corporate participation on Canadian campuses is more rigid than in the US.

Program champion and faculty instructor for the Bus 448 Advertising and Promotion class, Cathy Ace notes the students have grown tremendously from their experience. "They've learned how to work as a team, handle tight budgets, manage their time, and meet deadlines. This project was the lab for the business student. It's so much better than a case study". In addition to offering real hands on experience, students are positioned better for a competitive marketplace. "I've had a client hire directly from a presentation", notes EdVenture's Tony Sgrow. The program delivers experience and better job prospects for the students. The sponsoring client gains valuable marketing insight and exposure. The University involved is profiled as progressive and innovative. And now you can benefit from their approach for your next promotional marketing event. Everyone wins.

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