

FOSTERING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH – A MARKETING PLAN

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Skills covered: communication, creativity, team/ relational/
leadership skills

Estimated number of lectures / teaching sessions needed: 15
academic hours

Aim: communicate effectively in English within a business environment applying entrepreneurial and creativity skills through the conception and presentation of a Marketing Plan; foster students' ability to identify and use content in core areas – management, economics, marketing.

Brief Abstract: The increasing globalisation of trade has changed the international business arena dramatically. Effective communication across cultures demands specific competences, joining the ability to negotiate with the necessity of doing so in an internationally recognised idiom. This module intends to promote students' capacity to conceive something new –a tangible product or service - using their creativity and knowledge to prepare a Marketing Plan in the English language. Having in mind the SMART objectives of any Marketing Plan (be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed) and a good outline of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion and people (for services)), students are asked to conjugate their entrepreneurial skills with linguistic skills, embedding written and oral competences in a final presentation to class that should evidence a good command of terminology, concepts and grammar, as well as willingness to succeed in an entrepreneurial setting.

Methods applied: the result of the students' work with the use of the module will be a presentation to be recorded and assessed by the class in an attempt to enhance critical and comparative skills. To achieve this, the following techniques will/can be used: brainstorming and team work; task-based learning; inter-cultural training; role-play and simulations; input from job-experienced students; language focus - vocabulary and terminology listing, explanation and usage, pronunciation; writing and presenting content; videos and other relevant material.

Type of classes: this module can be applied within a bachelor and/or master degree as well as in intensive short courses.

Type of students: University students. Core fields of study: economics, management, marketing, communication.

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Additional Material :

- Powerpoint Presentations
- Exercises

INTRODUCTION

Understanding and applying key entrepreneurial competences is vital to succeed in business. The way each person approaches his/her goals will determine future employability opportunities and leadership challenges in today's dynamic agenda.

One of the most effective tools in business environments is communication. Write and talk in a proper way by articulating thoughts clearly and concisely, select and use appropriate terminology and style, and focus on objectives, will greatly enhance the ability to succeed.

Why choosing a Marketing Plan to foster student's communication and entrepreneurial skills? First of all, a Marketing Plan is a basic tool for a product or service to succeed since it specifies the key elements of the business and provides a clear pathway to objectives, tasks and return on investment. Second of all, a Marketing Plan is a result of team work, demanding exchange of ideas and consensus. Third equally important factor, presenting a Marketing Plan also gives the opportunity to students to lead at least one of the topics in the presentation with a high degree of personal involvement – a test to their entrepreneurial 'aura'.

Preliminary activity:

Students will gather in groups of four or five members and simulate they belong to a company. With that aim in mind, students will be ready to gear their exercises towards the Marketing Plan right from the beginning.

1. BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

1.1 Fundamentals of email writing

Email is the basic form of written business communication today. The overload of messages makes it extremely important to know what you want to say and how you want to say it. The exchange of information needed in any teamwork project calls for knowledge on the tone, degree of formality, planning of topics, brevity and clarity of message.

This first part will approach the aim and content of a business email, abbreviations, greeting and ending possibilities, organization of topics and sentence structure on areas related to the Marketing Plan.

Skills: written communication in business English – email structure and specificities, formality issues, vocabulary, grammar, text writing; entrepreneurial attitude – ability to negotiate and persuade partners, ability to enquire, ability to provide information.

Exercises and Activities:

After explanation of the rules for email writing, students will practice terminology, sentence construction, as well as formal and informal emails. The chapter will end with the writing and exchange of email messages to an advertising agency, where students can start brainstorming ideas for the Marketing Plan.

(A PowerPoint presentation and material with exercises is provided in the attachments)

1.2 Fundamentals of phone/ face-to-face conversation.

Knowing how to address a business partner on the phone or face-to-face in an appropriate manner requires sensitivity but also a high degree of confidence in your communication skills. And that needs practice.

In this topic, students will learn ways to begin and end a business call, specific vocabulary related to phone conversation, and how to apply different degrees of formality. Listening and role-play exercises will be used. How to persuade, how to reach an agreement, how to state your opinion, how to respect the others' point of view, how to follow-up, how to apologize – these are examples of situations that can happen on the phone when preparing a Marketing Plan. In addition, students will also practice face-to-face conversation when simulating a business meeting.

Skills: oral communication in business English – phone vocabulary and expressions, formality issues, ability to sustain and conduct conversation on the phone and face-to-face; entrepreneurial attitude – ability to conquer your partner's attention and interest, ability to present your arguments.

Exercises and Activities:

Students will proceed with exercises on terminology, phone idioms, sentence construction and ordering. In addition, students will simulate conversation on the phone in formal and informal contexts (arranging an appointment, taking a message, checking arrangements). Following the previous email written to an ad agency, each team will simulate a phone call and a face-to-face conversation with the agency in a business meeting.

(A PowerPoint presentation and material with exercises is provided in the attachments)

1.3 Presentation techniques.

Presentations are now a common feature of working life. To give a presentation in English has become increasingly common and sometimes mandatory. For many, perhaps the majority of professionals around the globe, English is not their mother tongue and this task may constitute a real challenge, even for those with good command of the language.

This topic intends to convey knowledge on different stages of a presentation, through learning and practising specific expressions and structures. Techniques on how to deliver a presentation will also be tested, from the way you dress and move, to the way you position your voice or face the audience.

To achieve this, students will be exposed to different types of learning materials, for example, listening exercises and grammar tips. The way we structure the presentation will also be explained, making use of common sentences to begin, continue or end a topic. During the lecturing hours, students are invited to differentiate and apply formal and informal ways of addressing the audience. In addition, since time is money, students will learn how to control the timespan of their topics and the overload of slides.

This particular part of the course will already give students some important guidelines for their final presentation, emphasizing techniques that will help them to catch the attention of the public, be concise and effective in the message, and also demonstrate an entrepreneurial, professional attitude.

Skills: oral and written communication – how to structure your message, how to convey it effectively to your audience, grammar rules, business idioms; entrepreneurial skills – be clear, focused, interesting, creative and persuasive.

Exercises and Activities:

In this topic students will have exercises on terminology, sentence construction and grammar. How to organize ideas and prepare an adequate PowerPoint presentation will also be discussed. In the end, each team will present their company following the guidelines provided.

(A PowerPoint presentation and material with exercises is provided in the attachments)

Lecturing time for part 1: 5 hours

2. KEY COMPONENTS OF A MARKETING PLAN

A Marketing Plan is part of a comprehensive business plan, offering the marketing team the possibility of detailing the tactics used to achieve the marketing goals. For the purpose of the course, the Marketing Plan students should prepare will focus on a single product or service.

It is foreseen that not all students will be acquainted with the concepts contained in the chapter. Therefore, and also due to time restrictions, the topics will be lectured in a simple and clear way, providing the necessary knowledge to build a simplified Marketing Plan.

Preliminary activity:

Students should get together once again and revise their company aims.

2.1 Corporate culture

Corporate culture describes and governs the way a company thinks and acts. This mission statement can be a written document but also a common feeling among all people involved in the project.

In this topic students will get acquainted with specific vocabulary related to companies: how they are created, what is involved in a business cycle, types of companies, departments and positions, markets and competitors.

Skills: communication skills- grammar and vocabulary; entrepreneurial skills – knowledge on corporate culture, structure and management.

Exercises and Activities:

After explanation and conveyance of terminology students will be asked to practice by paying attention to expressions, completing sentences and underlining words. Students will dig deeper into the company's business and brainstorm ideas for the Marketing Plan based on the knowledge conveyed in this topic.

(A PowerPoint presentation and material with exercises is provided in the attachments)

2.2 A Marketing Plan: marketing tools, the marketing mix; segmentation, targeting and positioning

For a Marketing Plan to be effective, it must be sustained by a sound marketing mix. That mix derives from a set of tools which supports the company's actions. So, what is a Marketing Plan and how can it be set up? To answer that question, students will learn how to use a SWOT analysis, with special emphasis on the Strengths and Weaknesses, how to establish SMART objectives, how to identify PEST variables, and how to define a Unique Selling Proposition (USP).

As the Marketing Plan will be product/service specific, after applying these tools students will be able to have a broader picture of the market and the product/service they would like to launch. That brings us to an explanation of the marketing mix: product, price, place and promotion. The balance of these four aspects may dictate the success or failure of the business.

For the purpose of the course, topics on the Marketing Plan will be based on the five stages of SMART technique: analyse situation, set marketing objectives, meet objectives, define tactics and implement control.

The concepts of segmentation, targeting and positioning are introduced at this point. To understand how the market can be divided into customer subsets is an important step: which potential customers the company will focus on. Students will learn specific terminology on common market segments and consider different variables that contribute to this division: demographic, geographic, psychological factors are among the most relevant. Based on the knowledge they already have on 'their' brand, students will be able to have an idea on the market segments they will target, characterizing them according to the variables commonly used for this purpose.

The four main elements of the marketing mix are then addressed: product, price, place and promotion. Product and service types, together with terminology on classification of tangible goods, will be discussed. Students will also be familiar with the widespread concept of BCGM and conscious that products have life cycles.

Skills: communication skills- grammar and vocabulary; entrepreneurial skills – knowledge on tools that are useful in all business levels, sensitivity towards the market, ability to differentiate between internal and external factors, awareness of company's positioning.

Exercises and activities:

After explanation and conveyance of terminology and concepts students will be asked to practice the topics with the following exercises: writing down important questions before starting planning the marketing plan, filling in a SWOT analysis worksheet and a USP analysis worksheet, consider PEST variables, define market segments, identify trends in segmentation, combine words, classify products, identify BCGM concepts.

(A PowerPoint presentation and material with exercises is provided in the attachments)

2.3 Finding the customer: branding; data collection methods; customer needs and behavior; pricing strategies

Now that students have selected their product or service, they must start working on the branding and positioning. A brand has a myriad of important aspects to be taken into account: it can have its own voice and personality, it conveys a set of values, it should be supported by a mission and transmit a certain vision. Students will get acquainted with this 'brand behavior and experience' by going through terminology related to the topic.

To further define the brand, students will discuss their brand values and the way it should position itself in the mind of consumers, that is, how it should be perceived by the desired market segments and in which way it differs from the competition.

To find your customer you need to do a great deal of research. Data collection methods will be explained, with emphasis on questionnaires. Students will perceive that they can be divided into desk and field research, and also that we may conduct different types of surveys.

Similarly to products and services, the customer also has a life cycle: the needs and behaviour changes along the years and the way we purchase may be considerably influenced by effectiveness of the brand's marketing strategy. At this point, students should brainstorm on the needs and wants their brand is expected to fulfil.

Now students have an idea of the product/service they want to sell and to who they want to sell it to. It's now time to understand how much the customer would be willing to pay for it.

A field research will take place at this point. For the purpose of the course, the data collection method suggested will be the street interview. Based on all of the items already brainstormed for each product/service, the groups will prepare a questionnaire and interview up to 15 people. The results will be analysed and incorporated in the presentation.

Skills: communication skills- grammar and vocabulary; ability to have a face-to-face conversation; entrepreneurial skills – relational and leadership skills, creativity, awareness of the importance of a brand, decision-taking.

Exercises and activities:

Students will practice terminology related to brand, market research, graph description and pricing strategies. Based on the brand mission, vision and values, students are asked to

imagine a logo and a slogan for the product/service they will launch. In addition, students will prepare a questionnaire with open and close format questions, considering the type of respondents and the possibility of skewed responses, in an attempt to obtain the most accurate results possible.

(A PowerPoint presentation and material with exercises is provided in the attachments)

2.4 Reaching the customer: logistics and packaging; promotion; return on investment.

The first two Ps of the marketing mix are quite defined by now. Students still need to decide how they will place and promote the product/service. The ‘right product, at the right price’ should be sold ‘at the right place’. Distribution strategies and logistics are then closely linked to this success formula. Students will understand that distribution can be done directly or indirectly through various means and involving a chain of different people. Also, some terminology on packages and containers will alert students to the complexity of transportation but also to the importance of the ‘cover’ of the product/service. In this specific part, students will conceive the package of the product and, in the case of a service, its ‘wrapping’.

To complete the USP, the product/service has to be promoted in an effective and cost-saving way. Techniques such as Above-the-Line, Below-the-Line and Through-the-Line will be explained and considered in the Marketing Plan, together with information on media strategy, planning and buying. Out-Of-Home advertising constitutes another important aspect of promotion, comprising many categories. The press and the importance of online advertising are also included in this topic, together with trade shows and merchandising. Still, word-of-mouth and buzz marketing continues to be one of the most influential aspects of promotion and the seed to the success may be contained in the way we brief the ad agency. When preparing the Marketing Plan, students will have the opportunity to combine knowledge on these topics with practical activities lectured in points 1.1 and 1.2

Considerations on budget and Return on Investment will sum up the project. Sustained by the previous brainstorming on the different Ps of the marketing mix and on the additional factors that will contribute to the success of the Marketing Plan, students will be asked to review all decisions taken and define an approximate amount expected for the Marketing Plan (although budget is not covered by this course, its importance is crucial for the success of the marketing plan).

Skills: communication skills- grammar and vocabulary; ability to have a face-to-face conversation, ability to talk on the phone, ability to write an email; entrepreneurial skills – budget consciousness, creativity, leadership, team-work.

Exercises and activities:

Students will learn and practice terminology related to placement and promotion: shipping methods, advertising strategies, trade show specificities. They will also be asked to revise previous contacts with the ad agency and practice similar exercises with trade fair organizers. Rehearsal of dialogues with prospective clients at a trade fair will conclude this section.

(A PowerPoint presentation and material with exercises is provided in the attachments)

Lecturing time for part 2: 5 hours

3. THE MARKETING PLAN

This last part of the course will give students the opportunity to present to class the result of their team work. Students are asked to gather in groups and prepare their Marketing Plan. Students should base their work on class materials, but other relevant sources of information are also welcome.

The aim of the project was to be able to communicate effectively in English within a business environment. The presentation of the Marketing Plan will test students' skills on entrepreneurship, more specifically on management and economics applied to marketing. Their ability to create something new, to analyse the chances it will have to succeed, to surpass obstacles and to persuade the market – the audience in front of them – will make students move out from their 'bubbles', an essential skill to promote employability.

It is widely accepted that English is the language of business, and that is even more accurate in the marketing field, where the majority of terms are used in that language. The fact that this course conveys basic knowledge in many topics in English provides students with a wide range of helpful terminology to be applied in all business areas. Furthermore, content on written and oral competences will enrich students' knowledge on how to address business partners and on how to maintain a business relationship.

Students will then conjugate their entrepreneurial skills with linguistic skills in this final presentation to class.

3.1 Writing down the Marketing Plan.

Students will gather all information resulting from previous activities and the work already discussed and conducted to prepare their Marketing Plan.

The Marketing Plan should contain the following steps:

1. Company: name, area of business, dimension.
2. Explanation of product or service to be launched: USP
3. Present the SWOT analysis and the SMART objectives for the product/service
4. Establish brand values and positioning; presenting a slogan and a logo
5. Definition of market segments
6. Presentation and analysis of questionnaire conducted through street interview
7. Definition of pricing strategy
8. Definition of placement strategy, including presentation of package
9. Definition of promotion strategy
 - 9.1 Briefing an ad agency – email writing; contacting the ad agency after promotion has been suggested – phone call; meeting the ad agency representatives.
 - 9.3 Be present in a trade show – email writing; talk to potential clients at the booth – dialogue
10. Budget and ROI – assessment of expenditure and presentation of results one year after launching the product/service through the explanation of a graph

3.2 Presenting the Marketing Plan.

Each group of students will present the Marketing Plan to class using a 20-minute PowerPoint or Prezi presentation. Pitch deck presentations are also welcome.

The simulation of the dialogue with the ad-agency and the dialogue with the client in the trade-fair booth will take 10 to 15 minutes.

Students may present a video with an example of a street-interview or a jingle of the brand. That part may take 5 to 10 minutes.

The presentation of each group will be recorded by the teacher.

3.3 Assessing the Marketing Plan.

Each group will visualize the recording of the presentation and issue their critical opinion on different aspects, such as:

The effectiveness of communication:

Was my discourse clear and focused?

Was my pronunciation understandable?

Did I make grammar mistakes? Were they clearly noticed?

Did I manage to catch the attention of the audience? How?

...

The effectiveness of the message:

Was the product/service distinctive enough to attract the audience?

Did I use the marketing tools correctly?

Did the marketing mix evidence a balance among the different Ps?
Were my arguments coherent?

...

The evidence/appropriateness of the entrepreneurial skills:

Did my presentation evidence my entrepreneurial ability?

Did my presentation evidence leadership qualities?

Did my presentation demonstrate that I can be creative and persuasive?

Was it visible that the presentation was a result of team work?

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Lecturing time for part 3: 5 hours

4. REFERENCES

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