

Preparing the next generation of marketing executives

Issued by [Wits Business School](#)

23 Nov 2020

The face of marketing in the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) is changing. Are business schools doing enough to develop the next generation of marketing executives?



Dr Thomas Anning-Dorson, senior lecturer in Marketing at Wits Business School, believes in order to succeed in this task, graduate schools must have a clear understanding of the changing marketing industry, not only through research, but also through active corporate engagement.

“Some graduate schools succeed in this, but some don’t. The value of such an approach is that it informs what the real needs of graduate students and corporations are, and ensures a relevant and agile curriculum,” says Anning-Dorson.

“In addition, in order to adequately prepare the graduate student to take on a more strategic role, the pedagogy should focus on problem solving,” adds Anning-Dorson. “In other words, classroom interactions should focus on real scenarios or dilemmas, and case analysis. Theoretical concepts must translate into practice and be industry relevant. I believe this is lacking in some graduate schools. Case studies help marketing faculty and students to keep abreast of trends in the marketplace.”

The case method has long been central to teaching at WBS, which was one of the first business schools in Africa to establish its own case centre. The centre has produced more than 250 cases to date, many of them on marketing.

When it comes to trends in marketing, the most notable one to emerge in the last ten years, according to Anning-Dorson, is that of customer dominance.

“The focus of marketing - and the larger business - is value creation and delivery, and what is value is largely determined by the customer. Marketing has changed, and the change is seen in how value is created and delivered to the customer who is the dominant factor in marketing success.”

“Businesses are now creating platforms for customers to create their own value. Engagement, not just what some business call communication, is the most important currency. Over the last couple of years, the successful businesses are those who have understood the principle of customer engagement and do all that is possible to be in touch with the customer,” he says.

The 4IR has brought enhanced opportunities for meaningful customer engagement and active personalisation through data usage, notes Anning-Dorson.

“Increasingly, marketers will need to use data to understand their customers’ media consumption, predict their needs and wants, and enhance the overall customer experience. Marketers should move from campaigns that turn on and off, to agile content that responds to today’s “always on” consumers,” he says.

What remains, however, is the central position of the customer in all marketing campaigns, whether digital or not.

“The dominance of the customer will continue to dictate marketing practice. Understanding what is valuable to the customer and how he or she expects that value to be delivered should be the preoccupation of both the marketing practitioner and academic.”

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