

# What's In a Name? Exploring Curricula Naming for Marketing Communication Courses

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## ABSTRACT

*Over the years the marketing communication curriculum in both undergraduate and graduate programs has undergone changes in content as well as in program names. There is currently debate on what to name programs that cover advertising, public relations, direct marketing, personal selling and the other tactical areas that deal with marketing communication. Should they be kept separate or integrated? This paper will explore the curricula naming issue. Whether a program is called Advertising, Integrated Marketing Communications or Strategic Communications, matters to practitioners, students and the faculty that will be teaching in these programs.*

## INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a dynamic field with mergers and changes to the business occurring at a record pace. Many educational institutions fall short of keeping up with the industry changes. The academic environment is much more reflective and slower to adopt change. There must be debate and controversy when major changes take place. This is especially true when there are different academic departments from different schools involved (i.e. journalism, communication and business). Even when changes to the curriculum take place, many times the attitudes and practices of educators remain the same despite the changes (Pasadeos, 2000).

There is currently debate on what to name programs that cover advertising, public relations, direct marketing, personal selling and the other tactical areas that deal with marketing communication. Should they be kept separate or integrated? This paper will explore the curricula naming issue. Whether a program is called Advertising, Integrated Marketing Communications or Strategic Communications matters to practitioners, students and the faculty that will be teaching in these programs.

## INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION

When the term integrated marketing communication (IMC) first appeared in the 1980s, many thought the philosophy was a fad, instead IMC became a driving force in changes that occurred over the next decades (Larsen and Len-Rios, 2006). In the early 1970s many educators called for more integration between marketing and journalism (Ross, 1973) and between public relations and speech communication education (Trent and Trent, 1976). During the 1990s,

integration between public relations and marketing began to appear in education under the Integrated Marketing Communication name (Pasadeos, 2000). Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, a pioneer in IMC education started their graduate program in IMC in 1991. The evolution of their program was not without problems due to the tension between faculties from journalism and marketing (Schulman, 2006).

Practitioners and educators alike tout the benefits of IMC including synergy created through coordination, cost savings and effectiveness (Griffin, Glenn and Pasadeos 1998; Novelli 1989-90). In a survey directed to Advertising and PR professionals, Rose and Miller (1994), found that professionals in both professions recognized the validity of the integration of advertising and PR and realized that to succeed in their fields, one must become more of a generalist.

There are numerous definitions of IMC, but most address the following points 1) embracing a comprehensive and strategic view of marketing communication 2) striving for coordination across *all* media; and 3) initiating the media planning process with the customer (Schultz, Tannebaum, Lauterborn, 1993; Schultz and Barnes, 1995; Ogden, 1998). The American Association of Advertising Agencies (Schultz, 1993) provides the following definition of IMC:

A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines – for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communications impact.

According to Nowak and Phelps “the walls between the major marketing communication disciplines...are collapsing,” (p.50). The Task Force on Integrated Communications called for a “more conceptually unified and integrated program of communication study” (Duncan, Caywood & Newson, 1993, p. 1). The Task Force concluded that individuals and agencies that are prepared to work in an IMC environment will be more likely to succeed. In terms of student preparedness, the Task Force stated:

Both business and professional education have sometimes pursued specialization in the practice of advertising and public relations without building stronger relationships ... Integration through new knowledge, research, cross-training and education could develop a more liberally educated student in schools of ... mass communications. (Duncan, Caywood & Newsom, 1993, p. 26)

According to Rose and Miller (1994) public relations educators seem to oppose IMC when compared to advertising educators. In fact, the Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) of the Public Relations Society of America opposed the findings of The Task Force on Integration (Ferguson and Turk, 1993). Lauzen (1994) believes the move toward integration of Public Relations and other areas is an “encroachment” on the field. Encroachment is “the assignment of non-public relations professionals to manage the public relations function” (Lauzen, 1994).

When the functions of two departments within an organization overlap, the department with more resources (power, money, support, perceived value) takes over the department with less power (Lauzen, 1993). In this case the marketing or advertising department has more resources than the public relations area. It comes as no surprise then that Public Relations practitioners and professionals are guarding their profession.

Although IMC has become well accepted at the practitioner level, the same can not be said for undergraduate education. One of the reasons may be that different educators have a differing view on what constitutes integration. Integration can be perceived as the joining of two disciplines as when students take courses from humanities and business or as in the integration of advertising, PR other areas of marketing (Larssen and Len-Rios, 2006). These differences in perspective account for the different names of programs. The most popular of which are Integrated Marketing Communications, Strategic Communications or Marketing Communications.

A review of the names of the programs accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) reveals the most popular names (included are colleges, universities, schools, department or divisions) in order of popularity are, Journalism, Journalism and Mass Communication(s) and Communication. Advertising is taught in many of the programs and appears as undergraduate degrees (BA or BS) in some programs. Many that do have degrees in advertising combine public relations with the degree.

In terms of the names of the programs from the business field, a viewing of schools accredited through the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) shows that most advertising programs are housed in the Marketing curriculum which generally fall under the Business Administration degree as an option or track. Although there are many courses that appear under integrated marketing communication (or some variation such as managing marketing communications), there are very few programs from either discipline called Integrated Marketing Communication (2 at the undergraduate and 1 at the graduate level).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review of literature it is clear that there are changes taking place, albeit slower than industry changes. Although IMC has been adopted at the fractioned level, critics believe that there is not enough empirical data to support the success of IMC at the practitioner level to make sweeping changes to curricula. It is easy to speak about integration but true integration is often more difficult in reality to implement. This is even more apparent at the collegiate level due to differences in power and turf wars that may accompany curriculum changes.

As Maskulka, Ogden and Ogden (2003) suggest, IMC must move to a firmer theoretical platform that draws from the combined literatures of organizational behavior and strategic planning. In addition we believe the focus of IMC efforts will rely more on strategic focus, organizational structure and process and less on message content as the focal points of integration.

We recommend a formation of a task force to standardize terms within the discipline. This could be accomplished at the American Advertising Association's annual meeting. This would be ideal because there are people attending that represent the differing departments that may teach the course. Although there are many options, we believe the *Integrated Marketing Communication* title is better than simply Advertising (unless Advertising is the only subject

being taught). We also recommend that *Strategic Marketing Communication* be adopted for graduate level coursework. This title better reflects the strategic nature of the level of coursework.

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