

CORPORATE SPONSORED COMPETITION IN SOCIAL MEDIA CLASS: HOW DOES IT BENEFIT STUDENTS AND THE CORPORATION?

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Integrated marketing communication techniques are the most embraced strategies adopted by both big and small firms to develop and sustain brand loyalty. Though not as pervasive as advertising and social media, public relations are an integral part of IMC strategy. Public relation is defined as “the management function which evaluates the public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of individual or an organization with public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance”. The purpose of public relations is to create a heightened positive image of the company. It also contributes to the authenticity and engagement elements of a brand building exercise.

Google Online Marketing Challenge, designed to enhance students’ marketing skills and give them a unique hands-on opportunity may very well be considered a public relations activity. From public relations perspective, it serves a dual purpose. First, the name recognition itself is a very powerful attraction for interested students and encourages them to engage in a program of action sponsored by Google. The exposure and very close association with the brand contributes to raising brand awareness and pursuant loyalty. Secondly, this competition also allows Google to attract potential employees while increasing public understanding. Google’s Online Marketing Challenge can be described as “context-focused philanthropy” where the undertaking contributes positively to the environment in which a company operates.

In addition, the challenge lends credence to Google’s founders’ philosophy detailed in their book *How Google Works*. Google is always in search of “smart creatives.” They are always looking for people who have basically some kind of technical capability in some area. Besides programming, they also scout for students with technical abilities and business acumen. The GMOC is an avenue to begin the process. It familiarizes students with the use of many of Google’s online tools. Students are asked to create an effective online marketing campaign using Google AdWords, Google’s premier advertising product.

In the ever changing world of social media marketing, business schools are focused on preparing students with real-world skills to be successful in this fast growing, high demand field. For the past nine years, Google has provided opportunity for over 110,000 students and professors to compete in the Google Online Marketing Challenge (GOMC) to create and run online advertising campaigns for businesses and non-profits organizations (<https://www.google.com/onlinechallenge/>). Student teams between three to six students are given a \$250 Adwords budget to develop and administer an online campaign for approximately three weeks. Students are required to research a company/organization then submit a pre-campaign providing an overview of the client and the proposed AdWords strategy. Upon completion of the Adwords campaign, the students are required to submit a post-campaign report to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign with future recommendations. To help students gain valuable experience and skills, Google provides resources and access to a digital marketing course to educate students in the area of digital marketing.

In the spring of 2016, Konya Cipul Weber incorporated the GOMC in her Social Media Marketing course at the undergraduate level to enhance student learning and provide valuable, marketable skills. She will share her experience as the administrator of the GOMC competition with lesson learned and recommendations to improve the experience based upon students’ feedback and her own observations.

Presentation outline:

I. Role of publicity and public relations in IMC

- II. Can GMOC be interpreted as a public relation component of Google's IMC?
- III. How does the challenge help Google in its public relations endeavor?
- IV. Overview of Google Online Marketing Challenge (GOMC): Explain the objectives and outcomes of the competition.
- V. Participating business/organization perspective: Describe the expectations and advantages of participation in the GOMC from the business/organization standpoint. Explain the eligibility for participation.
- VI. Students' perspective: Summarize the students' experience and marketing skills gained from participation.
 - VII. Professor perspective: Explain how using the GOMC enhances the learning experience by providing real world experience for students.
 - VIII. GOMC resources: Describe the resources available for students and professors to enhance their experience.
 - IX. Lessons learned: Provide recommendations to improve the student experience and learning outcomes.
 - X. Conclusion

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