

An Assessment of Changing
Graduate Attributes
and Competencies in the
Marketing Communication Profession

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Table of Contents

Certificate of Authorship	5
Dedication	6
Acknowledgements	7
Professional Editorial Assistance	8
Terminology	9
Abstract	12
Chapter 1 Introduction	14
1 Introduction	14
1.1 An Introduction to the Field of Study	14
1.2 2009 and the state of the nation	15
1.3 2009 and the Australian higher education sector	20
1.4 Statement of research problem	22
1.5 Aims of the study	22
1.6 Structure of the study and a summary of the projects	26
1.7 Relevance of this Doctoral Program	28
Chapter 2 Context of the Study and a Review of the Literature	30
2. Overview	30
2.1 The emergence of themes in personal and professional practice	31
2.1.1 An evolving understanding of professional practice	31
2.1.2 Reflection or intuitive reaction?	33
2.1.3 Professional practice knowledge	34
2.2 Approaches to and goals of the study	36
2.3 The study in context	36
2.3.1 Marketing and the role of marketing communication	37
2.3.2 Evolving marketing communication education	38
2.3.3 The importance of accrediting agencies	40
2.3.4 The changing media landscape	42

2.4	A review of the literature	43
Chapter 3 Research Methodologies		46
3	Introduction	46
3.1	Research methodologies	47
	3.3.1 Research Project 1: Industry Review	47
	3.3.2 Research Project 2: International Strategies	50
	3.3.3 Research Project 3: Practitioner perspectives	52
Chapter 4 Research Project 1:		55
4	Overview of the Project	55
4.1	Context for the Project	55
4.2	Objectives of the Project: <i>“Undergraduate attributes and competencies in marketing communication: lessons learned from an advertising course review”</i>	58
4.2.1	Outcomes	59
4.3	Publications	62
Chapter 5 Research Project 2: International strategies		63
5	Overview of the Project	63
5.1	Context for the Project	63
5.2	Objectives of the Project: <i>“Preparing students for professional practice: benchmark strategies for student teaching and learning”</i>	65
5.3	Outcomes of the Project	66
5.4	Publications	68
Chapter 6 Research Project 3: Practitioner perspectives		69
6	Overview of the Project	69
6.1	Context for the Project	69
6.2	Objectives of the Project: <i>“Identification of graduate proficiencies in marketing communication: industry insights”</i>	71

6.3	Outcomes of the Project	72
6.4	Publications	76
Chapter 7 Themes within the Study		77
7.	Introduction	77
7.1	Major themes identified	80
7.2	Emergent themes	81
Chapter 8 Conclusion and Recommendations		84
8.	Conclusion	84
8.1	Summary of findings	84
8.2	The way forward	97
	8.2.1 Recommendations	98
8.3	Limitations of the study and further research directions	91
Bibliography		93
Research Papers		100
	Research Project 1	101
	Research Project 2	127
	Research Project 3	146



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For my wife and for my sons.
Thank you for allowing me to pursue my passions.

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Terminology

Exegesis

An exegesis is defined as ‘a critical explanation or analysis, especially of a text’. Within this work the term ‘exegesis’ is used to describe the body of work that constitutes the critical explanation of the three research projects.

Study

The term ‘study’ refers to the overall research study that encompasses the three interconnected research projects and the exegesis.

Project/s

The term ‘project/s’ is used when referring to each of the three research works individually.

Advertising

Advertising is the common term for the promotion of products and services. More recently the term ‘marketing communication’ has been used when referring to the application of a combination of promotional techniques and communication disciplines.

Marketing Communication

Marketing communication is defined as communication via a mix of promotional techniques, ranging from advertising and public relations to direct marketing, so as to create awareness and propensity to purchase by the consumer.

Advertising Agency

Traditionally, the term used to describe a company that is employed in the creation and implementation of advertising or marketing communication campaigns for a client organization. In recent times, the term ‘advertising agency’ has lost much of its significance as the advertising agency has fragmented into two specific entities:

- ‘The Creative Agency’: involved primarily in the development of communication concepts for their client; and
- ‘The Media Agency’: responsible for the strategic planning and purchasing of media (communication channels) to communicate with the client’s customers.

Industry

Used when referring to the marketing communication and/or advertising industry as a whole.

Stakeholders

Used when referring to all parties involved in the industry. In the context of this dissertation/portfolio, it is used to encompass the ‘academy’ (educational institutions and in particular, universities), the ‘advertising agencies’ (both creative and media), and the ‘client organizations’.

Attributes

Attributes are defined as characteristics or qualities of a thing or person. Within the educational context of this work, the term is used to identify a demonstrated understanding through scholarly engagement of, and commitment to, values-driven practice in a field of study.

Competencies

Competencies are defined as the ability to perform, or having the implicit knowledge to perform a task. Graduate competencies here are identified as the specific academic and practiced-based skills developed through the mastery of the subject matter inherent in the courses taught.

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to the set of courses, coursework, and their content offered at a school or university that, in the case of this study, are of a high academic standard and meet the identified needs of relevant professions and industry groups.

Course or Program

The terms refer to the structured delivery of individual subjects and subject content that make up the university degree specialisation, i.e.: the Bachelor of Arts (Communication-Advertising). Some universities refer to these degree structures as ‘programs’. At Charles Sturt University, they are referred to as ‘courses’.

Subject

The term refers to an individual area of study within a complete discipline specialisation. Students undertake multiple subjects each year, and while complete in themselves, these subjects progressively build a body of knowledge across specific aspects of communication; for example, strategy, research, media, and creative, to constitute a complete program or course.

Faculty

The term Faculty has different meanings in different educational systems. In the United States it is used to refer to academic staff members of a college or institution. In Australia, it refers to a component of a university’s structure, for example the Faculty of Arts, with members of academia referred to as academic staff.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy defines the activities of educating, teaching and instructing. In relation to this dissertation/portfolio, the term is used to define the practice of teaching and specifically, the value of practice-based learning in enabling students to integrate experiential classroom learning with occupational/workplace learning.

Abstract

Teaching and learning strategies are changing amongst those educators who consider the aim of effective education is to prepare students for assimilation into professional practice.

With the advent of new technologies and greater access to information by consumers, the marketing communication environment is experiencing an unprecedented ‘velocity of change’ and this is being reflected in educational practice. Commentators agree that we are witnessing significant changes to the structure of the marketing communication industry. New consumer attitudes, new technologies, and new communication strategies to keep up with these changes, are driving a trend that is forcing a re-think in the composition of the communications landscape. It is also precipitating the re-defining of the skills and proficiencies required by the next generation of marketing communication professionals.

Since the latter half of 2008 the economic environment has been in a state of upheaval as the world experiences what is now being referred to as a ‘global recession’; arguably the toughest economic period since the great depression of the 1920’s. Societies are anticipating radical changes as tougher economic conditions dictate changing patterns to life and behavior. As is becoming evident, the flow-on effects to consumerism are having an effect on the marketing communication industry, and specifically, on graduate employment.

This study is an investigation of the evolving requirements of the marketing communication industry, both nationally and internationally. It seeks to identify strategies for the development and implementation of contemporary pedagogical practices that connect learning to the identified graduate attributes that align with industry requirements and economic influences. The study aims firstly to establish the current state of the marketing communication industry in Australia and internationally and then, by way of dialogue and investigation, to identify insights into the development of graduate attributes and competencies required to meet the demands of this industry.

Importantly, it acknowledges current world socio-economic conditions and influences and recognises the significant changes that the marketing communication industry is currently undergoing.

University course content has historically focused on addressing the needs of the direct employer of graduates – in this case, the advertising agencies. This study clearly identifies that there now exists a significant divide between agency and client, with many clients believing that their agencies are lagging behind in the evolution and application of new marketing communication skills. As a result, expectations of what constitutes graduate proficiencies vary significantly between agencies and clients. For educators this would suggest that curricula should now take into account not simply the requirements of the direct employers of graduates – the agencies – but the requirements of all industry stakeholders.

An important aspect of this study then, and one that separates it from other studies undertaken in the field, is that, in the process of identifying changing graduate attributes and proficiencies, it interrogates not simply the views of the direct employers of marketing communication graduates – the advertising and media agencies – but also those of the client companies that employ these agencies, and it does so from an international perspective.

Keywords:

Marketing communication; velocity of change; consumerism; stakeholders; graduate attributes; competencies

Chapter 1 Introduction

1 Introduction

Within marketing communication significant changes are taking place to the structure of the industry and the professional relationships between industry stakeholders. New consumer attitudes, new technologies, and new communication strategies to keep up with these changes are driving a trend that is forcing a re-think in the composition of the communications landscape. They are also demanding a re-defining of the skills and proficiencies required by the next generation of marketing communication professionals.

Within the context of this dissertation/portfolio a series of three research projects was undertaken over a three (3) year period from mid-2005 to June 2008. All three projects were interlinked and had a common goal: the identification of graduate attributes and competencies required to meet the challenges of a changing marketing communications industry. Through a process of investigation the three projects sought to deliver both a national and international perspective with regard to the global marketing communication industry and graduate employment.

A key aspect of this study and one that separates it from studies undertaken previously, is the identification of industry insights as they relate to the graduate attributes sought by all stakeholders in the industry. The study is both timely and important because it seeks to identify changing industry insights as they relate directly to the attributes and competencies sought by the marketing communication industry, and it does so from a global perspective.

1.1 An introduction to the field of study

At the commencement of this study in 2005 the world appeared to be living the good life, with a buoyant economic environment and consumer confidence at an all-time high. In Australia in late 2007 the new Federal Government had just assumed power and, in the process, had inherited a multi-billion dollar surplus as a result of the minerals and energy boom, and in particular, from trade with China. Business was good. The prognosis for the

future in late 2007 and early 2008 was one of continued prosperity, continued consumer confidence, and low unemployment. In the marketing communication sector the industry talked of both the increasing expenditure in benchmark areas, such as the media, and of concern over the shortage of appropriately skilled new talent entering the industry.

In the latter half of 2008, two separate events occurred that will prove to have a significant impact on the outcomes of this study. The first was the collapse of Wall Street in the United States and the flow-on effect of the financial ‘melt-down’ to the economies of many of the world’s most affluent countries. The second was the release of the long-awaited white paper *The Australian Government Review of Australian Higher Education*, known within the government and education communities as the ‘Bradley Review’.

1.2 2009 and the state of the nation

The financial melt-down in the US challenged the notion of the world’s financial well-being and shook consumer confidence and complacency to the core. With the unfolding collapse of the global economy, notions of ‘prosperity’ were replaced with the prospect of ‘economic recession’ as the reality of the sheer scale of the financial mismanagement that was unfolding in the United States in late 2008 took on world-wide significance.

Australia had been somewhat protected from the full effects of the first wave of financial failings by a robust economy and judicial government control of our major financial institutions. Nevertheless, we now find that the environment of 2009 is distinctly different to that of the decade to this date. In late 2008, barometers of consumer confidence such as retail expenditure and motor vehicle sales showed a significant down turn on previous years, even with government injections of billions of dollars into the market to boost consumer confidence. As a result we are witnessing changing consumer spending patterns and with them, the employment landscape within marketing communication, an industry that thrives in a robust consumer economy.

A report published in Australia in September 2008 by Nielson Media Research (2008) on the performance of this country’s top advertisers and economic activity throughout the

financial year July 2007 to June 2008 showed a continuation of strong economic results for Australia, including the lowest unemployment figures in decades, a strengthening Australian dollar and a commodity-driven market. However, in response to softening economic conditions in the second half of the 2008 fiscal year, advertising activity and expenditure planning adopted a more conservative short-term approach as many high profile advertisers focused on protecting their 'bottom line' (Nielsen Media Research, 2008). As a result, Australia's main media sector delivered an adjusted 5% estimated growth due to the rapid economic slowdown in this second half of 2008.

At the same time, the motor vehicle industry, long one of the mainstays of marketing communication expenditure in Australia (and indeed worldwide), was seen to be slowing to a halt. A lead story in the influential industry publication *Ad News* (p.14) stated 'The automotive industry is set to send shockwaves through the corridors of advertising and media agencies in Australia.' Commenting on the outlook for marketing communication expenditure in 2009 and beyond, Fusion Strategy managing director Steve Allen suggested that budgets would invariably be cut. 'In 2009, it's entirely possible that we will see a 10 per cent cut, and it could be worse' (Allen, 2008).

In late 2008, *Ad News* featured the story: 'Mega Consumerism is Dead' and sub-titled this headline with the prediction 'Global warming and economic turmoil have consumers in a flutter. Sir Martin Sorrell has talked about the pitfalls of "conspicuous consumerism" and noted that the move away from mega-consumerism is the trend at the moment.'

The *Ad News* (pp.14-15) report asked the question: 'Are we entering an era where materialism and consumerism will be shunned?', and queried 'What does that mean for marketers and ad agencies engaged to "stoke the fire of consumerism"?'

A report in the same publication just two months later addressed the inevitable issue of employment in the marketing communication sector and suggested that the economic downturn is forcing marketing communication employers to rethink their approach to hiring staff. A recruitment research survey, the *Hudson Recruitment Focus on Sales*,

Marketing and Communication (Hudson Recruitment, 2008) found that one in four sales, marketing and communications employers believed access to quality staff had been negatively impacted on by the recent economic downturn. This Australian study, based on responses from over 800 marketing and communication-hiring managers, found that many employers were rethinking their employee management strategies as a result of the current economic climate. Of the employers surveyed, 44 per cent stated that they were focusing on tighter management of their recruitment budgets, 37 per cent were choosing to focus on improving productivity among their existing staff, whilst 42 per cent continued to have difficulty in sourcing candidates with appropriate skills (Hudson Recruitment, 2008). This study followed the *Hudson Employment Expectations Report* released earlier in 2008 which showed a 14 per cent decline in the number of employers expecting to hire staff at the start of 2009 (Hudson Recruitment, 2008).

According to Robert Oliver, director of online recruitment company The Oliver Group, competition for entry level jobs in 2009 will be ‘fierce’, with job opportunities for graduates predicted to fall by 20.2 per cent (Ad News, p.13). In November 2008 the Oliver Job Index identified that the advertising and media sector suffered the steepest drop in jobs advertised online, with positions advertised down 36.5 per cent on the corresponding period in 2007. The report stated: ‘In the worsening economic situation, for many companies the first step has been to cut advertising and marketing expenditure’ (Oliver, 2008).

On a more positive note, Oliver noted that government initiatives such as interest rate cuts, lower mortgages and lower fuel costs could turn consumer sentiment around. ‘If you can create jobs, there’s a rich talent pool available’ (Oliver, 2008). In support of this prediction by the Oliver Group, in January 2009 Ad News announced that the long-running talent shortage in marketing communication in Australia was over, with a ‘glut of experienced workers entering the market for the first time in years’ (Ad News, p.11).

Belinda Kerr, managing director of recruitment firm ICUR, confirmed that there was now an influx of candidates entering the market, suggesting that a large number of people with industry experience are looking for work in digital, creative, account management and other

senior and junior roles at a time when agencies are putting a freeze on hiring (Kerr, 2009). Managing director of Melbourne advertising agency the Boiler Room, Mark Addis stated ‘I haven’t really seen this type of thing since 2001. On the one hand it’s good if we need to hire contractors for short spikes of work, but on the other hand it’s a shame to see so many talented people looking for work’ (Addis, 2009). In line with this tightening job market there is an apparent end to the demand by advertising employees for over-inflated salaries. Industry commentators note that ‘Generation Y’ staffers have stopped asking for pay rises as they face their first financial crisis since joining the workforce (Ad News, p.11).

The flow-on effect of this employment situation is a new conservatism at the executive level. A further report in Ad News (p.6), suggested that executives appear to be ‘more skittish’ at the thought of change. Anthony Hourigan, chief executive officer of specialist recruitment company Hourigan International commented ‘Companies (agencies) are deliberately hanging on to their top talent to shield themselves this year because they want to get out of this economic malaise of 2009. These companies are utilizing this retention strategy as a long-term investment’ (Hourigan, 2009).

Peter Biggs, managing director of Clemenger BBDO Melbourne, admitted that the economic downturn will bring changes to consumer habits, but suggested that in Australia, while people will be spending less money overall, they will keep spending (Ad News, p.15). Biggs believes that while this situation will not necessarily mean the demise of the advertising agency, it will see a shift in the role of the traditional agency, possibly with a greater focus on ‘digital’, and a change in its structure in terms of people and people skills (Biggs, 2008).

Interestingly, this expected shift in the role of the advertising agency was forecast by industry observers as early as 2004 (AdMap, 2004).

An example of this shift in employment balance can already be seen within the digital employment environment. In the latter half of 2008, after five years of highly publicised skill shortages and rapidly escalating wages, digital agencies were reporting an unprecedented increase in the number and quality of available candidates. According to

Richard Lord, chief executive marketing officer of Australia's largest digital services company Hydro, economic uncertainty, redundancies and widespread hiring freezes have helped ease demand and increase the number of candidates seeking new employment (Lord, 2008).

A report in early 2009 on the state of the interactive advertising market by international industry research group Research and Markets, suggests that 2009 will be the first of many years in which some components of the up-until-now burgeoning interactive advertising market will show little or no growth, or may even decline. The report indicates that spending levels of advertisers, which had grown at a frenetic 47 per cent in 2008, are expected to slow to just 8 per cent in 2009. It is suggested that media companies expecting double-digit and even triple-digit increases in their interactive budgets are unlikely to meet these expectations (Research and Markets, 2009).

In mid-November 2008, Ad News published the strongest forecast yet for 2009 and beyond for the marketing communication industry. The report headline announced this prediction bluntly: 'Belt Up for the Down Turn' (Ad News, p.14). The report opened with the confirmation that industry analysts had downgraded advertising forecasts for 2009 with predictions that, as the US slides into its worst recession since 1982, the Australian marketing communication industry is bracing for what could be its sharpest downturn in decades. The report noted that key indicators such as car sales had fallen 3.1 per cent in September 2008, and predictions were that one million Australians could be unemployed by 2010 (Ad News, p.14). As a result, many media analysts downgraded their advertising revenue forecasts from an up-to 3 per cent growth in 2009 to a 2 to 3 per cent decline. Robert Morgan, executive chairman of Australia largest marketing communication group, the Clemenger Group, suggests optimistically that the market may still see some growth, but that there definitely has to be a mentality of managing costs prudently (Morgan, 2008).

The flow-on effect of this economic situation is on employment. Many marketing communication agencies are indicating zero growth in staff numbers in 2009 (Ad News, p.11).

1.3 2009 and the Australian higher education sector

The second event to have an impact on this study, the Australian Government's evaluation of the tertiary education sector in Australia occurred at the end of 2008. As a result of the Australian Federal Government's election pledge in 2007 to comprehensively review higher education in this country, the highly anticipated *Australian Government Review of Australian Higher Education* was released in mid December 2008. The review, chaired by Professor Denise Bradley was established to address the question of whether this critical sector of education was structured, organised and financed to position Australia to compete effectively in the new globalised economy. The opening statement of the report's Executive Summary enunciated the reality of the perceived current situation:

Australia faces a critical moment in the history of higher education. There is an international consensus that the reach, quality and performance of the nation's higher education system will be key determinants of its economic and social progress. If we are to maintain our high standard of living, underpinned by a robust democracy and civil and just society, we need an outstanding, internationally competitive higher education system.

Bradley et al, 2008

This doctoral research study identifies that the global economic crisis from mid 2008, combined with the findings of the 2008 Bradley Review, will have a significant effect on the future of a marketing communication industry that thrives on buoyant economic conditions and looks to economic stability and surety for confidence in graduate employment.

As we enter 2009, it is apparent that the world has changed dramatically. A marketing communication industry that just 12 months ago could not attract sufficient new staff to meet burgeoning needs is now scaling back on employment. With the revised prognosis for employment, now more than ever universities will find themselves under increasing pressure from employers to equip graduates with real-world skills and capabilities to prepare them for the demands of a challenging employment sector.

Pedagogical practice

The literature identifies that teaching and learning strategies are changing in the professional field as one contemporary view of education is clearly aimed at preparing students for assimilation into professional practice (Kerr & Proud, 2005; McCulloch, 2005). Today's professional pedagogies embrace notions of 'cognitive apprenticeships' (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989), 'communities of practice', (Wenger 1998), 'experiential learning' (Weil & McGill, 1998), and 'work-integrated learning' (Wee Keng Neo, 2004), reflecting strategies that are both centered on activity within authentic learning environments and are predicated upon identified industry criteria.

While there much been written in the literature concerning vocational teaching practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wee Keng Neo, 2004; Guilkers et al, 2004), and to a lesser extent, graduate attributes (Waller, Shao, Bao, & Perry, 2003; Kerr & Proud, 2005), there appears to be no documentation that specifically identifies what educational skills will be required by graduates to meet the expectations of both the direct employer – the advertising and media agencies – and the client organizations that employ these agencies.

As Morris (2005) indicates, it is becoming apparent that employers are seeking qualifications beyond the academic degree. They want hands-on skills; employees who are good communicators, team players and dedicated to on-going learning. The question is, should these attributes be solely a reflection of the views of the traditional industry employer – the advertising and media agencies – or does the real pressure for appropriate graduate qualifications come from the client companies that are the ultimate employers of these agencies?

This study aims firstly to establish the current state of the marketing communication industry in both Australia and internationally – and then, by way of rigorous dialogue and investigation, to identify insights into the development of graduate attributes and competencies required to meet the demands of this industry. Importantly, it recognizes the significant changes that the marketing communication industry is currently undergoing and

seeks to identify the requirements of all stakeholders involved - the academy, the advertising agencies, and client companies.

1.4 Statement of the Research Problem

“Are graduate attributes and competencies in line with the contemporary requirements of all stakeholders involved in a changing marketing communication industry?”

Specifically, do the attributes and competencies of graduates of university marketing communication and advertising courses meet, not simply the expectations of the marketing communication agencies that employ these graduates, but also those of the client companies that employ these marketing communication agencies? Here the term ‘marketing communication agencies’ is used to describe companies that have now become known through industry fragmentation as either ‘creative agencies’ or ‘media agencies’.

It is important to note that this issue of agency fragmentation is of concern, as it is creating a blurring of responsibilities between the two agency types and creating uncertainty in the minds of clients as to what services each agency type has to offer. In reviewing the literature there appears to be a gap in the knowledge pertaining to the concise identification of the graduate expectations. Studies to date, while identifying to varying degrees the attributes sought by the agencies, have not addressed the needs and expectations the client companies who employ these agencies.

1.5 Aims of the Study

The objective of this study is to inform the development of university marketing communication/advertising pedagogy, both in content and in teaching methodologies, so as to appropriately prepare graduates for the transition from education to professional practice. It is apparent that graduates must be equipped with the skills, attributes and competencies that are synchronous with contemporary industry requirements. The challenge for educators, in acknowledging the significant changes within the industry, is to identify the graduate attributes and competencies required by all the stakeholders involved.

A review of marketing communication pedagogical practice within universities (McCulloch, 2007) suggests that many educators are teaching the relevant theory of marketing communication, and then via experiential learning environments (Weil & McGill, 1998), are encouraging students to apply this learned theory to practical applications. Within Charles Sturt University this model is exemplified via the situated learning environment of Kajulu Communications, the on-campus student advertising agency of Charles Sturt University (McCulloch, 2007).

Kajulu Communications is predicated on the Newman (1992) model, and proposes a concept of authentic intellectual achievement based on three criteria:

- development of student knowledge through disciplined enquiry beyond the classroom;
- disciplined enquiry that replicates the skills and techniques of professionals; and
- reflection and simulation of problems, issues and situations encountered in the real world.

Guilikers, Bastiaens & Kirschner (2004) add another critical dimension to the notions of Newman (1992), that of physical context – the location and surrounds where learning will happen – thereby adding tacit support the replication of the industry workplace environment in Kajulu Communications.

Within the literature, the concept of a ‘tripartite’ approach occurs regularly. In the first instance it reflects the inter-relationship of the *academy*, the *profession*, and the *industry* in the development of professional practice knowledge. Secondly, it is reflected in Schein’s (1995) concept of the normative professional curriculum, specifically in terms of relevant science, relevant applied science and the practicum. In the context of this study, the ‘tripartite’ may be expressed:

The *academy*, the marketing communication *agency*, and the *client*.

Previous research by the author (McCulloch, 2005) suggests that most university advertising course curricula are predicated on:

- the assumed knowledge of the academic responsible for the development and delivery of the course/subject;
- the identification of content through various degrees of collaboration with industry.

But, what of the input from the client organizations and specifically, what is the inter-relationship between these three stakeholder groups – university, agency, agency client – and how can input from these three entities better inform educational practice?

This study addresses three specific areas:

- (i) A continuation of current research in the areas of situated and work-integrated learning, with a shift from a focus on qualitative research to quantitative research methodologies.
- (ii) Research into the evolving requirements of the ‘industry’, from the perspective of both the marketing communication agencies who are the direct employers of our graduates, and their client companies who employ the agencies.
- (iii) Specific research into the changing client landscape – the relationship between clients and their agencies, the identification of what clients are now seeking from both their agencies and agency employees.

Previous studies (Waller et al, 2003; Spence-Stone & Byrne, 2004; Kerr & Proud, 2005) indicate that, in the main, university courses have focused on the needs of the direct employer of university graduates, the marketing communication/advertising agencies. More recent studies (McCulloch, 2007), suggest that agencies themselves are lagging behind in the evolution and application of new learning and that this has been the case for a number of years.

As far back as 2004, in an issue of the British industry journal Admap (p.3), the editorial stated:

Anyone interested in marketing services business will be aware that all is not well in the agency world. Even as the global holding companies continue to expand, the business models on which some core components operate are looking increasingly creaky.

AdMap, (2004)

The Winterberry Group (2006) white paper entitled *The State of the Agency: Market Transformation & the New Client Dynamic* identified that there was a need for significant agency change in the areas of:

- restructuring decision-making processes to foster greater accountability through pay-for-performance pricing;
- adaptation of the scope of agency services, providing clients with an integrated offering that spans both above-the-line and below-the-line channels of marketing spectrum;
- adoption of organizational structures that carry the creative concepts across old and new media outlets.

The Winterberry Group report concluded:

The measures (above) promote a favourable agency/client dynamic by enhancing client loyalty and preventing the commoditization of agency services.

Winterberry Group, 2006

These observations by the Winterberry Group (2006) support the findings of an Australian industry study by Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) that identified three key attributes of contemporary practitioners. Firstly, they need to be generalists rather than specialists. Secondly, practitioners (and their agencies) need to be inclusive, with the focus being on the client's business, rather than seeking sole ownership of the 'big idea'. Finally, the requirement is to be interactive, with practitioners understanding the consumer's engagement with emerging technologies and the relevance of these technologies in building brand relationships.

National and international industry trade publications have for some time reported on what they refer to as the shortcomings of agencies – from structures, facilities and remuneration policies, to a focus on return on investment (ROI). Considering the changes occurring within the marketing communication industry, and taking into account the rhetoric of the industry media, it is evident that there is an imperative to develop an understanding of the ‘big picture’ – the changing dynamics of the industry – and to be aware of the changing needs of all stakeholders involved, so as to be able to inform practice to address the needs of the stakeholders involved.

1.6 Structure of the study and a summary of the projects

Within the dissertation/portfolio a series of three research projects was undertaken over the two (2) year period, mid-2006 to June 2008. Each project was designed to inform the next. All three studies were interlinked and had a common goal: the identification of graduate attributes and competencies required for a contemporary marketing communications industry. Through a planned process of investigation the three projects were designed to deliver a national and international perspective on the global marketing communication industry and specifically, graduate employment criteria.

Project 1: A review of the industry in Australia

The first project constituted an investigation of the current Australian marketing communication environment. The study sought to identify, by way of interviews with practitioners and peak industry bodies representing the creative and media agencies and clients, industry trends as well as graduate expectations of leading industry practitioners. This study was undertaken with the cooperation and support of the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA) and the Media Federation of Australia (MFA) representing the ‘creative’ and ‘media’ agencies, and the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) representing the client companies. Outcomes of the study informed the 2008 advertising course review for Charles Sturt University. Key findings from this first study offered important Australian perspectives, provided a foundation for the following two studies.

Project 2: A review of the international education environment

The second project drew on current teaching and learning strategies at Charles Sturt University, using as a case study the methodologies employed within the student advertising agency Kajulu Communications. Specifically the study focused on the pedagogical practices inherent in notions of authentic problem-based learning (Wee Keng Neo, 2004), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and work-integrated learning (Gibson, Brodie, Sharpe, & Wong, 2006) employed within the advertising course at Charles Sturt University as a basis for a survey of Australian and international advertising students.

Project 3: Global insights into the preparation of graduates

The final project was an investigation of the industry from an international point of view and included a review of the contemporary literature and the gathering of insights from national and international academics, educators and industry practitioners. From discussions with both Australian and international agencies and agency executives, as well as with representatives of client companies, the objective was to ascertain what commonalities or differences existed in terms of industry expectations of graduate attributes.

In 2008, a series of depth interviews with international industry professionals from advertising agencies and client companies, as well as a survey of leading international academics and educators was undertaken at the International Advertising Association World Education Conference and World Advertising Congress in Washington DC. This was followed in Australia by a series of online interviews with selected Australian agencies.

Utilizing the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA) database, the final research component of the project comprised an online survey of human resource managers from leading Australian advertising agencies. The objective of the online survey was to gain opinions from direct employers – human resource managers and/or those identified as

responsible for graduate procurement in advertising agencies – in relation to the skills and competencies sought in university graduates by their agencies.

1.7 Relevance of this doctoral study

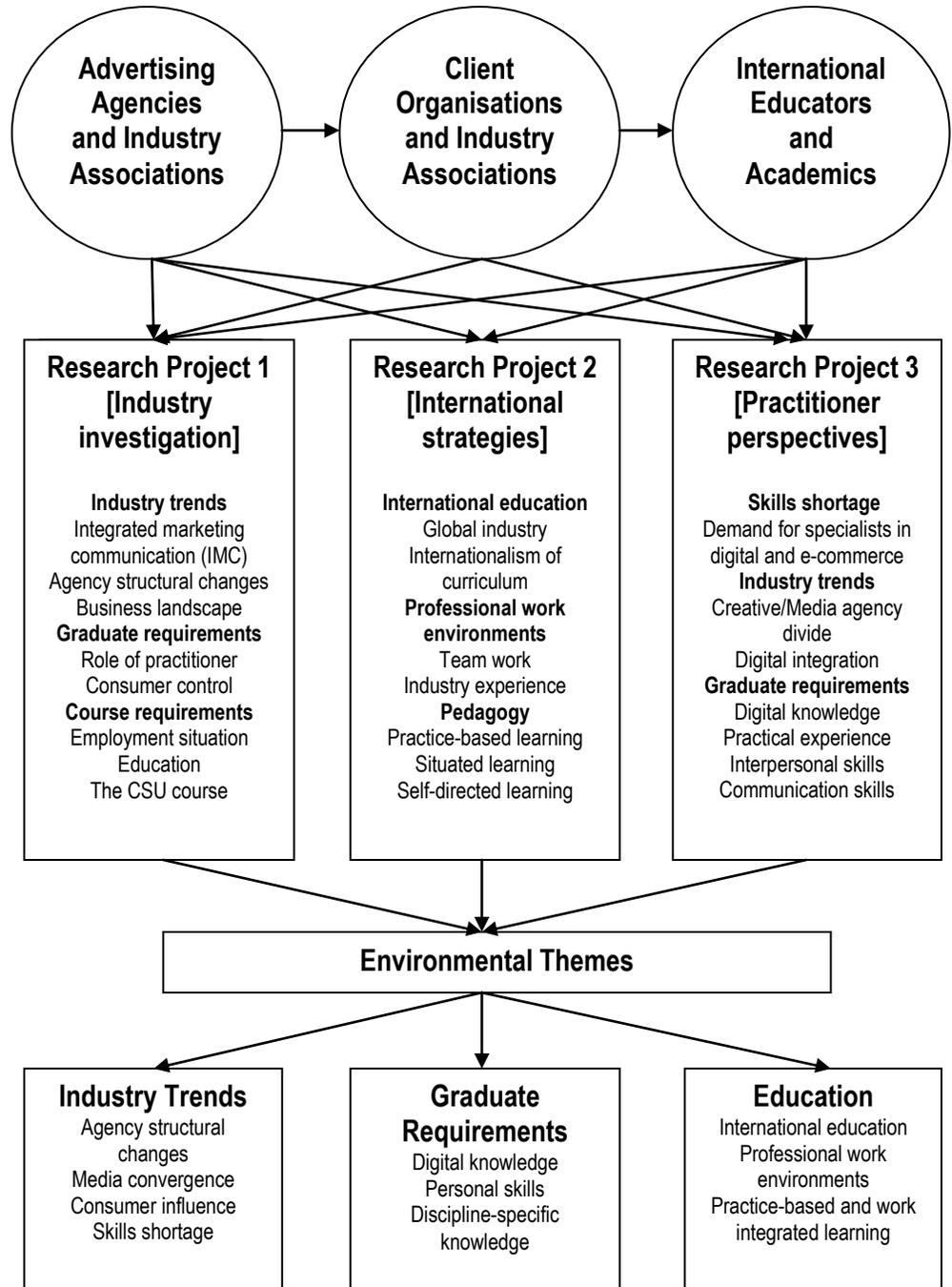
This study combines three individual research projects. Whilst each had clearly identified objectives and desired outcomes, within this dissertation/portfolio they combine to add new knowledge in the field and to inform pedagogical practices that connect learning and teaching to the graduate attributes and proficiencies required in marketing communication.

The study is important as it provides:

- (i) A means of identifying strategies for the preparation of graduates to meet the demands of a changing global marketing communication industry – strategies that must take into account emerging trends and contribute to improvements to the content of advertising courses and the focus of marketing communication education within universities.
- (ii) New knowledge that will help inform marketing communication education on an international level and align course content with identified international requirements, thus providing opportunities to market Australian course/s internationally and also attract international students to study in Australia.
- (iii) A contribution to the broader body of knowledge within the marketing communication industry by informing all stakeholders involved; the educational institutions who teach the graduates, the creative and media agencies who employ the graduates, and the business community and client companies who employ the agencies.

Diagram 1 illustrates the complementary relationship of the three research projects, depicting their place within the changing media landscape and showing their respective connections with the industry's stakeholders. The diagram displays the environmental dynamics which impact marketing communications professionals, both academicians and practitioners as they address attributes and competencies, as well as curricular content.

Diagram 1: Industry dynamics and the changing media landscape



Chapter 2 Context of the Study and a Review of the Literature

2 Overview

As a practitioner with over 30 years experience in the marketing communication industry, in recent years in academia I have found myself drawn between the traditional interpretations of the practitioner and professional practice, and those applied by the academy. Green, Kemmis, Commbe, Unsworth, Palridge, & Simpson (2003) identify the overlapping of the three influences of learning; the Profession, the Workplace and the Academy, as the foundation for the development of the professional doctorate. In doing so, they acknowledge the dual function of new knowledge generation and the development of a research capacity, citing the need for this dual function to be explicitly linked to both practice and industry (p.42).

Brennan (1998) notes that academia has always enjoyed a close relationship with certain professions, and hence has been involved in research related to the practice of those professions. Lee, Green, & Brennan (2000) maintain that in recent times the development of the 'knowledge society' (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott, & Trow 1994; Stehr, 1994) has placed significant demands on higher education. As Brennan (1998) identifies, the doctorate is an appropriate model of study and investigation as it resonates with efforts to restructure the economy through increasing the qualifications of, and thus, the flexibility of the workforce. The model allows for simultaneous engagement in workplace practice and research-oriented practice, with an outcome focused on relevance and application to inform the professions. This reflects the belief that knowledge is produced, not in the enclosed space of the disciplinary university, but in the context of application (Gibbons et al, 1994).

This definition of the doctorate and scope of doctoral activity fits well with the nature and purpose of the research outlined in this study, in that it is practiced-based and undertaken within both academia and industry, to inform both the academy and industry. In doing so

the study also acknowledges the objectives identified in the Bradley Review (2008) to grow the credentials-driven employment environment in Australia.

2.1 The emergence of themes in personal and professional practice

With three decades of practitioner experience, and now with a number of years within the tertiary education sector, I find myself in an interesting position, that of the ‘practitioner/academic’. When I first entered the workforce marketing communication was not recognised as a profession, hence formal tertiary education in the field did not exist. Education, as such, was ‘on-the-job’, and to succeed in the business one learned as one went, bringing experience, natural skill and cunning to bear. Colleges that did provide rudimentary professional training were seen to be second tier, and certainly not in the same league as universities.

Higgs, Titchen, & Neville (2001) adds legitimacy to all professional endeavours, suggesting that a ‘profession’ is any occupational group that is able to lay claim to a body of knowledge unique to itself and whose members are able to practice competently, autonomously and with accountability. Additionally, these members should be able to contribute to the development of that profession’s body of knowledge. Therefore it could be argued that, whilst vocationally orientated professions such as marketing communication may still not be seen by all to have the academic standing of those such as medicine and law, they are nonetheless professions in their own right and deserved of epistemological consideration.

2.1.1 An evolving understanding of professional practice

Schon (1995) refers to the field of professional practice as a ‘swampy area’ because many of the decisions made in managing problems are based on what is often referred to as ‘gut feeling’, and on data that are often times uncertain, ambiguous or hidden. But what is ‘gut feeling’ if not the ability to reflect on past events, to learn from these events, and then to apply this learning to new problems or issues at hand? One might suggest that what we did almost instinctively as practitioners, and based on practitioner experience, we now do as vocational teachers. Unlike the past however, the learning spaces of today are not the

dispatch departments of the multi-national advertising agencies where you served your apprenticeship at the bottom of the ladder. Rather, they are the professionally equipped and staffed situated learning environments of forward thinking educational institutions.

For gut feeling to be effective for anyone other than that individual, it needs to be formalized, not simply anecdotal. Reflecting on my own learning within the industry it was based on the master/apprentice model (Jensen, Shepard, Gwyer, & Hack, 1992). That is, the accumulating of and passing on of knowledge as the formalization of the learning – young trainees working beside their mentors, learning as they worked – on the job.

Jensen et al (1992) and Higgs and Titchen (1995) suggest that this accumulated knowledge takes three forms; theoretical knowledge, professional knowledge, and personal knowledge. Higgs et al (2001) acknowledge that professional knowledge and personal knowledge may be tacit and embedded in either the practice itself or in who the person is. This supports the master/apprentice model (Jensen et al, 1992), that of self-learning by observing the master, and then doing as the apprentice. Implicit in this is the belief that professional knowledge is developed from each individual's practical experience and is then tested and modified by daily practice.

It is simultaneously recognized that the knowledge of individual practitioners may be shared with others in the profession. This then contributes to the professional knowledge of others and helps create a body of knowledge that is 'owned' by the profession. This act of knowledge-sharing may occur within the context of day-to-day collegial relationships, such as those experienced within the working environment of an organisation, through the representation of peak industry bodies, or via academic and industry journals.

Advertising is not generally regarded as a 'science'. While theory may guide practice, there are invariably no set formulas for solutions. Success comes from understanding the theory of communication and combining this with reflection on experience to suit each unique situation. Often, professional knowledge may be gained by simply being there, with solutions being derived from the combination of theory and as well as from practice.

Reflecting on the concept of professional knowledge, the work of Titchen (2000) identifies that knowledge is acquired via theoretical principles utilized in practice becoming adopted and transformed into practical principles. For example, new concepts such as those of integrated marketing communication (IMC) developed by scholars such as Professor Don Schultz of Northwestern University, become imbedded in today's communication methodologies.

This leads to the notion of theory and practice being dialectical. That is, theory and practice informing each other. This notion is in contrast to views held by some academic researchers that suggest that theory explains, or informs practice, supported by the academy by, as Brennan (1998) describes it, 'the chauvinist tendency to assume that research does not occur outside the confines of the university...' From this dialectical view comes acknowledgment that practitioners, not only researchers, contribute valuable knowledge and expertise.

2.1.2 Reflection or intuitive reaction?

Boreham (1992) refers to mental challenges, suggesting that practitioners instinctively know what decisions or actions are appropriate given a certain situation, but are oftentimes unable to make explicit the knowledge that directs their actions. Higgs et al (2001) suggest that this intuition is often expressed via imbedded knowledge within the individual practitioner and that, given the right set of circumstances, becomes directed into actions. Hagar (1995) notes Schon's (1995) interpretation of knowing-in-action as underpinned by reflection: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-in-practice* – the almost subconscious fine-tuning of actions and learning based on experience. Whilst reflection has been a concept employed in an attempt to understand professional practice, Hagar (1995) suggests that experience, or as he terms it 'experience-based learning', plays a major role in both unnoticed learning and experiential or highly focused learning.

Hager (1995), citing Weil and McGill (1989), identifies multiple emphases for experiential learning that are relevant to the understanding and improving of professional practice. These relate to what may be identified as both informal and formal learning experiences;

informal in that knowledge and experience is gained almost unconsciously via the act of doing, and formal in that there is often-times a requirement for self-improvement and personal growth for continued job satisfaction.

This then raised the question: ‘Can this concept of experiential learning be taught within an educational context, or is it intuitive and something that is learned in-situ?’ Prior to entering academia I would have thought the latter. Now, having spent a number of years passing on the accumulated knowledge and experience gained over a lifetime of practice via my own teaching, I believe that it can be taught and that this teaching is enhanced when the learning takes place in an ‘experiential’ work environment.

2.1.3 Professional practice knowledge

Biggs and Titchen (1995) refer to the concept of professional practice knowledge. In doing so they note the distinction between the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge sake and knowledge gained for application to specific professional practice. This is a key distinction and one that is in line with the focus and direction of educationalists in vocational courses.

According to a higher education feature in the Australian Financial Review (p.22), universities have traditionally armed students with academic theory, but now the focus is on teaching them how to learn. Today, universities are finding themselves under increasing pressure from employers to equip graduates with practical skills and competencies (Reeves, 2005).

As far back as 1989, the Australian Federal Government recommended the introduction of education programs that were suited to professional settings. This was in line with a strong national policy emphasis on vocational education and ‘...the service role of universities in the production of useful knowledge so as to provide Australia with economic advantage in a global economy.’ (Lee et al, 2000).

This policy is clearly enunciated once again in the Review of Australian Higher Education (2008) which, under the heading ‘The Challenges for Australia’ states:

Analysis of our current performance points to an urgent need for both structural reforms and significant additional investment (in the sector). In 2020 Australia will not be where we aspire to be – in the top group of OECS countries in terms of participation and performance – unless we act, and act now.

Review of Australian Higher Education, 2008

Still to a very large extent government driven, current education goals are focused more on the development of competent students than on simple knowledge acquisition, the objective being the attaining of higher order thinking processes and competencies rather than factual knowledge and basic skills (Gulikers et al, 2004). This supports the model of knowledge acquisition within the workplace by practical involvement with the profession and the workplace, rather than the acquisition of knowledge simply through the accumulation of pure theory-based knowledge within the classroom. This vocational focus on learning is in line with the efforts of the Australian Government (2008) to restructure the economy through increasing the qualification of and flexibility of the workforce.

The nation will need more well-qualified people if it is to anticipate and meet the demands of a rapidly moving global economy. Work by Access Economics predicts that from 2010 the supply of people with undergraduate qualifications will not keep up with demand. (...) we need to turn the rhetoric of lifelong learning into a reality. A well-coordinated, systematic approach to addressing these complex issues and increasing the numbers gaining qualifications is vital.

Review of Australian Higher Education, 2008

During my time in academia I have come to appreciate the role of the master and of the apprentice, and the constructs of ‘situated learning’ and of ‘work-integrated learning’. I have come to support the notion that theory informs practice, and that practice in turn, informs theory. The literature argues the case for the application of the ‘theory informing practice/practice informing theory’ model. For educators, the challenge is to incorporate the new scholarship of action research into, as Schon (1995) terms it, a legitimate and appropriately rigorous way of knowing and generating knowledge.

2.2 Approaches to and goals of the study

Schein, as cited in Schon (1995) discusses the concept of ‘normative professional curriculum’. He states that first we must teach students the relevant theory, and then teach them the relevant ‘applied’ theory. Finally, we must provide them a practicum in which they can learn to apply classroom knowledge to the problems of everyday practice. This bears striking similarities to the connectivity inherent in the notion of an overlap between the profession, the workplace and the academy. My own teaching has been augmented by a research focus into the areas of professional industry practice, and specifically work-integrated learning. The objective has been to improve professional pedagogical practice in the development of contemporary graduate skills. In doing so, I have come to realize that beyond industry-relevant content there is a fundamental and absolute requirement for tertiary teaching and learning practices to be congruent with the practical working requirements of both the professions and business communities that our graduates are being prepared to join. This belief mirrors the mission of Charles Sturt University:

To produce graduates with a professional edge who are competitive in meeting present and changing needs of society, commerce and industry

Charles Sturt University Strategic Plan, 2007-2011.

In line with this concept of the university graduate, teaching and learning strategies are changing amongst many educators to incorporate elements of experience-based and work integrated learning in order to prepare student for assimilation into professional practice, thereby supporting the notion of the inter-relation of teaching and learning and assessment practices with the current requirements of all stakeholders within the marketing communication industry.

2.3 The study in context

The financial mismanagement in the United States and the flow-on effect in Australia have eroded consumer confidence. This has had a significant effect on business confidence, which in turn is placing financial constraints on the marketing communication industry. Compounding this situation, marketing communication is experiencing what I refer to as a ‘velocity of change’.

The industry is being transformed by rapid changes in technology, which in turn are pressuring practitioners to speed-up adaptation, and the academy to keep up with industry developments.

As Geimann (2001) notes, newspapers, magazines, broadcasters, public relations and advertising agencies are changing. Expansion of the Internet, world-wide web and social media platforms such as Facebook and Bebo are providing readers and viewers with the power to gather all kinds of information that was once the domain of the professional communicators and mass media practitioners. Unlimited access to information online by consumers has made reaching a mass audience, promoting a brand or company image, or selling a product more challenging for the marketer.

This new information society means that consumers now have access to unlimited information and with this, decision-making, without the pressures applied through traditional marketing channels.

2.3.1 Marketing and the role of marketing communication

Since the advent of modern consumerism in the early 1950s, *marketing* has played a major role in the success of companies, particularly those involved in the production and distribution of what are commonly referred to as ‘consumer goods’. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as ‘the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large’. That is, ‘the provision of information to facilitate a transaction between the producer and the consumer’ (AMA, 2007). Marketing practice is seen as a creative industry which includes advertising, distribution and selling. As Jain (2004) notes, in an era epitomized by the challenges of global competition, new consumer needs, shifting demographics and the exponential advances of technology, the development of marketing skills is essential if companies are to survive, let alone prosper. For companies today, the challenge lies in the identification and understanding of the unfolding markets, and the ability to be able to effectively and

persuasively communicate with the consumer. Or as Iacobucci and Calder (2003) suggest, ‘to deliver profitable solutions to the priority problems of target customers’.

Primarily concerned with demand generation, *marketing communication* distills the strategies involved with marketing messages through mediums such as advertising, branding, direct marketing, graphic design, packaging, promotion, publicity, sponsorship, sales promotion and online, to reach and influence identified consumer groups.

Traditionally the role of developing consumer communication messages lay with the advertising agencies. Working with marketers, their clients, advertising agencies developed communication strategies and then produced media communication campaigns that target identified consumer groups. In recent years two major influences have altered the marketing communication landscape. The first has been the development of new media, including the growth of online and social networking sites, and through this access by consumers to almost unlimited amounts of information – on anything and everything, at any time. The second has been, as The Winterberry Group (2006) refers to it, the “New Client Dynamic”; the fragmentation of the agency sector and with it, a growing divide between client and agency and a trend for clients who are increasingly dissatisfied with agencies’ willingness to recognise the ‘unfolding markets’ and embrace new communication mediums, to themselves perform many of the core communication functions traditionally the responsibility of their agencies. This situation reflects a lack of recognition amongst agencies that they are in reality *service* companies and that, if they fail to fulfill their purpose in both meeting (and exceeding) the demands of their clients, they risk losing their reason for being.

2.3.2 Evolving marketing communication education

These changes in the fundamental dynamics of the marketing communication industry, and specifically the emergence of two separate agency types – the media agency and the creative agency, combined with the growth of the media landscape are reflected in what is seen as a new era in marketing communication, one where marketers as well as their advertising agencies are being held accountable for the expenditure of marketing communication dollars. As Clow and Baach (2007) note, clients expect tangible results

from marketing communication campaigns. As a result of this focus on the return on investment (ROI), new relationships based on new skill-sets are being established between agencies and clients that reflect this accountability. From an educational perspective, this has seen a demand for a new generation of students graduating from university communication courses with broader real-world communication knowledge and skills. As a result, in recent years many university communication courses have evolved to incorporate notions of communication integration and specifically the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), ‘the coordination and integration of all marketing communication tools, avenues and sources within an organisation into a seamless program that maximises the impact on consumers and other end users *at minimal cost*’ (Clow and Baach, 2007). IMC not only offers a broader communications perspective, but also introduces essential elements of business and management, cost and accountability. With the growing focus on accountability, particularly in light of the current world economic climate, it is apparent that marketing communication education cannot simply rely on the development of ‘craft skills’ but must incorporate aspects of business acumen – practical teaching that relates specifically to clearly identified and relevant learning outcomes that are in line with evolving industry and commercial expectations.

Many marketing communication courses are now inclusive of both discipline-specific subjects and business-skill and people-skill subjects. Curricular includes knowledge development in marketing and business, buyer behaviour, research and strategy development, creative and production, channel planning and purchasing, as well as a familiarity with the new client/agency relationship models, the consumer environment, and the implications for all stakeholders of ethical consumer communication. Course structures are designed to expand from one subject to several related subjects, progressively adding to a student’s body of knowledge as building blocks, rather than as unrelated silos of information. Using Charles Sturt University as an example, the Advertising course curriculum is flexible in that it allows students to master mandatory core competency subjects, or ‘majors’ that provide essential skills and knowledge in line with the identified course outcomes in terms of attributes and competencies, and then choose ‘electives’ to add knowledge in areas that are of specific career interest to them.

The CSU Advertising course adds a further dimension to curriculum implementation, that of *practice-based learning*. The pedagogical value of practice-based learning lies in its capacity to enable students to integrate classroom learning with occupational/workplace learning, allowing them to develop learning outcomes that include an understanding of the norms and expectations of their future practice community. This is particularly important for it appears that, whilst most university marketing communication graduates (in Australia) currently find employment in marketing communication agencies; creative agencies and more recently with the growth of services, media agencies, a knowledge of the industry from the client's perspective is seen as important, if not essential by the client companies employing the agencies. Indeed, this knowledge, combined with possible industry work placement within client organisations may result in graduates finding employment in client firms.

As the CSU Strategic Plan 2007-2011 identifies, 'Practice-based learning provides opportunities for experiential learning that assists in the development of graduate attributes and enhances the quality of industry-aligned, relevant courses' (CSU, 2007). Practice-based learning is one of a range of terms applied to strategies that are employed to prepare students for professional practice. Other terms include work-integrated learning (WIL). According to Gibson et al (2006), work-integrated learning programs offer numerous benefits to the institution, including enhancing the attractiveness of the degree programs and developing new partnerships with industry. As an integral component of the curriculum, these programs may also facilitate the development of student competencies in an authentic work environment and, in many cases, leverage the practitioner skills of academic staff members in the development and implementation of the pedagogy.

2.3.3 The importance of accrediting agencies

Within universities, it is common for professional courses to require industry accreditation to be able to deliver curriculum that meets accepted professional standards. The role of accreditation and accrediting agencies is important as it ensures that the educational institution's faculty/academic staff holds appropriate academic and/or professional qualifications, they deliver contemporary instruction, and that the curriculum is in accord

with professional industry standards. Accreditation also brings with it recognition of the calibre of the institution and course and acts as an attraction for a quality cohort of students and new academic staff. In the United States the Association of Advanced Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) defines accreditation as “The process of voluntary, non-government review of educational institutions and programs”, adding that “institutional accreditation reviews the professional programs and academic units in a particular field of study for colleges and universities” (AACSB, 2009). Similarly, the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) is dedicated to promoting the highest standards for administrators, students and media professionals for education in journalism and mass communication.

Internationally, the marketing communication industry is represented by the International Advertising Association (IAA). The IAA’s professional development mission is to “develop state-of-the-art education programs for the preparation of individuals for the marketing communications industry of the 21st century” (IAA, 2009). Currently there are more than forty IAA Accredited Institutes (universities and colleges) with institutional membership in the IAA’s global advertising education network. In setting and maintaining a global standard of marketing communication education, the IAA ensures that academic staff and students must meet or exceed all IAA’s accreditation criteria concerning quality of faculty (academic staff), rigor of curriculum, and the acceptance of graduates within the profession (IAA, 2009). In Australia, the advertising industry is represented by the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA), an association of 185 companies and institutions providing advertising and marketing communication services. In tandem with the Advertising Federation of Australia, the Media Federation of Australia (MFA) was formed in 1997 with the objective of supporting those agencies that specialise in media services; media research, strategic planning, media negotiation and placement, and most recently, media education. The Media Federation of Australia accredits educational institutions that ‘meet the framework of courses created by members of the industry’ (MFA, 2009). Importantly, students from MFA accredited institutions who complete MFA accredited courses are given priority placement considerations within the MFA member

agencies. (In Australia, the Charles Sturt University Advertising course is accredited by the IAA, the AFA and the MFA).

From an educational perspective, common curricula standards across colleges and universities transnationally are desirable but difficult to achieve. The Bologna Process, signed in 1999 by an original twenty nine European countries, now represents a commitment by forty-five European countries to undertake a series of reforms in order to achieve greater consistency and portability across their higher education systems. The overarching objective of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that promotes mobility, attracts students and staff from Europe and from other parts of the world, and is internationally competitive through the facilitation of greater comparability and compatibility between the diverse higher education systems and institutions across Europe and indeed, the world (Australian Federal Ministry of Science and Education, 2009). It is believed that the Bologna Process will have a profound effect on higher education globally, as other countries outside Europe, including Australia are now beginning to consider the benefits of a global education system in terms of being seen to be ‘internationally accredited’ in the provision of higher education that is of a high quality and is relevant to international standards and requirements (Australian Educational International, 2009).

2.3.4 The changing media landscape

Marketing communication has historically been dominated by what is referred to as ‘above-the-line’ advertising media – television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and to a lesser extent, outdoor advertising. Until recently these media enjoyed the majority share of marketing communication budgets, accounting for 75 per cent of advertising expenditure (Winterberry Group, 2006).

Today, a change in balance in the marketer/consumer relationship has seen a shift in media expenditure focus. This has precipitated a re-think of what comprises media, in line with the need to better understand the dynamics of communication and how consumers receive information.

Underlying these changes in the communications mix are a number of developments stemming from technological, financial and cultural shifts. These changes have had a significant impact on the marketing communication landscape, and in particular on the services offered and the skills demanded of practitioners. Traditional media has proliferated to such an extent that ideas about how consumers receive information are now seen to be somewhat outdated. The requirement now is not to understand the mass market, rather an *integrated* market of individuals who we wish to communicate with.

In considering these industry changes and their effects on marketing communication education, the study by Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) into the creation of contemporary advertising leaders offers insights into the attributes of future practitioners and the implications for developing and nurturing them. The study identifies key practitioner attributes as ‘having an ability to be insightful, inclusive of others, interactive in outlook and innovative in thinking’ (Spence-Stone & Byrne, 2004).

Acknowledging the significant changes happening within the industry, it is apparent that the development of university course curricula in marketing communication education and contemporary teaching and learning practice must both take into account these changes and be predicated on the requirements of all industry shareholders.

2.4 A review of the literature

Much has been written in the literature concerning vocational teaching practices (Wenger, 1998; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Berryman, 1990; Spence-Stone & Byrne, 2004; Wee Keng Neo, 2004) and to a lesser extent, the identification of the graduate attributes required by the direct employers of graduates - the advertising and media agencies (Waller et al, 2003; Kerr & Proud, 2005). However, there appears no research that specifically correlates graduate attributes and competencies with the requirements of all stakeholders involved in the process.

The literature suggests that teaching and learning strategies need to change to keep pace with changing professional requirements. Brown et al (1989) introduce the concept of

cognitive apprenticeship, the development of concepts through continuing authentic activity. Cognitive apprenticeship supports learning in a domain (environment) by enabling students to acquire, develop and use cognitive tools in an authentic domain activity – experience in a real-world situation.

Executive director of the Australian Association of Graduate Employers, Ben Reeves (2005), maintains that real experience undertaken by students during their final year at university is worth more on a resume than top-ranking academic results. In support of Reeves (2005), the National Association of Careers Advisors' Joanne Tyler (2005) suggests that today most undergraduate curricula must include a mandatory internship period to integrate real-world experience into the industry course.

Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) identify that a university advertising program needs to be both responsive to industry needs and pedagogically sound. Their studies suggest that for advertising agencies, finding and keeping good staff is a major problem. The Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) findings are supported by those of Kerr & Proud (2005) who confirm that new practitioners need to be generalists rather than specialists. The studies of Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) and Kerr & Proud (2005) are both contemporary and enlightening in that they highlight a crucial aspect of the current state of the industry identifying that, while the level of client influence on agency functions varies, it is not unusual for clients to play 'a major role in agency operations to obtain the results they are seeking' (Waller et al, 2003).

In recent times the growing divide between agency and client has become obvious (Lee, 2006; Winterberry Group, 2006; Sophocleous, 2008). In reviewing the industry literature, it is apparent that, while the views and expectations of the creative and media agencies are acknowledged, there is no indication that the views or expectations of the client companies have been sought in the identification of marketing communication graduate attributes. Yet feedback from client companies contacted during the process of this study, as well as opinions of leading global client companies such as Procter & Gamble (IAA, 2006), suggests that they do have a definite point of view.

This would tend to suggest that, rather than being based on the traditional rhetoric and overstated requirements of the creative and media agencies, the identification of graduates' attributes and competencies must also take into account the views of all stakeholders and specifically, the needs of the client companies that employ the agencies.

Chapter 3 Research Methodologies

3. Introduction

This chapter of the exegesis presents an overview of the research methodologies and approaches to data gathering and the processes employed in the analysis of the three individual research projects. All three projects included an initial review of the literature as a precursor to specific investigation. The findings of each project progressively informed the next project until a complete picture emerged.

A review of the literature identified that studies conducted into the identification of graduate attributes in marketing communication in Australia to date had focused primarily on the specific professional skills identified by the advertising agencies in this country (Spence-Stone & Byrne, 2004; Waller et al, 2003; Kerr & Proud, 2005). Information for these studies was sourced primarily through interviews and focus groups conducted within the advertising industry itself. Few studies had investigated more broadly to take into account all stakeholders involved in the industry, and none had sought to do so on an international basis.

Initial investigations conducted during the first research project clearly identified a number of important factors to be considered in any contemporary research into changing graduates and competencies. Firstly, there are multiple stakeholders involved in the graduate recruitment process, and that not all had been consulted in the past in a review of graduate attributes. Secondly, it was necessary to take into account the changing role of the marketing communication industry when considering stakeholder expectations of the attributes and competencies required in university graduates. Finally, it must be acknowledged that the marketing communication industry is global therefore international perspectives will be valuable in framing recommendations for the effective preparation of graduates for entry into the industry.

In consideration of these factors, through a series of three separate yet interconnected research projects, the study identifies the graduate attributes and competencies that are seen as essential by the marketing communication industry. Importantly, it also identifies the educational requirements of academia in ensuring that the pedagogy is sound and course curricula are contemporary and relevant.

Investigations combined both primary and secondary research, and included:

- a review of the literature, including academic journals, industry journals and publications; and
- field research.

3.1 Research methodologies

The following section reviews the specific methodologies used in each of the three projects.

3.1.1 Research Project 1: Industry Review

The first project reviewed the current state of the marketing communication industry, and specifically, current educational practices, in order to identify strategies to inform an advertising course review at Charles Sturt University. The advertising course is reviewed every 5 years. Reviews prior to 2007 had primarily involved content analysis, supported by limited interrogation of practitioners' views via telephone surveys. In the main, these reviews had focused on course content as informed by the views and perspectives of advertising agency personnel as practitioners, as well as in their role as university graduate employers.

In contrast to these previous reviews, this first research project sought to identify, not only course content, but also the specific skills sought by all stakeholders involved.

- the creative and media agencies, as direct employers of the graduates;
- the peak industry bodies that represent agencies and client in the industry; and
- the client companies, as employers of the agencies.

Theoretical orientation

The research employed a modified grounded theory approach (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). That is, the theory was developed in a dialectical relationship of constant comparison with actual data gathered through qualitative research, making it more reflective of the practical situations being investigated than that of speculative derived theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1998).

As the population for the study was easily identified, and the sample could be selected in advance of data collection, it was felt that more elaborate forms of sampling would not be necessary. It should be noted at this stage that, in this instance, elements of a grounded theory-style approach were employed rather than a rigorous application of the methodology. The research aimed at establishing thematically derived categories from the data.

Data collection

Prior to engaging in data collection, a review of the literature was conducted to narrow the field of investigation. This also helped in the selection of a research methodology and in the eventual framing of questions. Additionally, a review of existing research – conference discussion papers, and meeting notes from course review discussions undertaken within the University – informed the process.

The first decision was one of methodology, whether we were seeking insights and opinions (qualitative methods) or statistical substantiation (quantitative methods). The decision to utilize a qualitative interview approach was based on the need to gain an in-depth understanding of industry dynamics.

An Industry Advisory Panel was constituted and comprised creative and media agency management, as well as senior executives from peak industry bodies representing the advertising agency sector, the media agency sector, the marketing communication industry and the client sector. Representative sampling was used to recruit participants.

Through established industry contacts, participants were identified and invited to take part in the project. The composition of the panel reflected the multiplicity of stakeholders.

Formal letters were sent inviting participation. A question guide was also provided to ensure that topics would be consistently covered across all participants. Questions were initially piloted with one participant and then refined for use with all participants. Questions provided a loose, yet logical framework for eliciting responses and prompting emerging concepts. Assurance was given that no interviewees would be identified and all data was to be stored securely.

Data analysis

Audio-taped interviews were transcribed and identified by participant code, and then dated to protect their identity. Categories were identified, as were major themes in the literature. A process of open coding was used to break down the data into basic concepts. This facilitated the identification of important issues and prompted the emergence of themes. At the conclusion of the process, 10 specific categories emerged, some interrelated. Six categories emerged from the literature. The two sources of data were correlated and from this, three central themes emerged:

- (i) Industry trends
- (ii) Graduate requirements
- (iii) Course requirements

Emerging themes and their categories were tabulated and verbatim interview segments were used in support of the findings (see Research Paper 1).

The outcomes of this project were contained in a final report which informed the advertising course review. The new course was introduced in 2008. A copy of the final report was sent to each member of the Industry Advisory Panel. The report formed the basis of an academic paper.

3.1.2 Research Project 2: International Strategies

The second research project sought to investigate both national (Australian) and international perspectives relating to the development of strategies for international student teaching and learning, as well as to identify the requirements for an internationally recognized advertising degree program. A major objective of the project was the identification of trends and influences in education that could impact on the preparation of university graduates for successful assimilation into the international marketing communication industry.

Project 2 used three investigative approaches:

- (i) A review of the literature relating to international education and the role of higher education in Australia.
- (ii) A case study approach, examining final year Australian and international student experiences in the situated learning environment of the student agency Kajulu Communications.
- (iii) A survey of an Australian and international final year cohort of advertising students.

Theoretical orientation

The first investigative approach consisted of a review of the literature pertaining to education on an international level, with a focus on the Asia Pacific region. The purpose was to review the existing body of knowledge and to identify any gaps in this knowledge.

The second approach was a case study. For this project the case study was used to help build an overall picture in support of both the literature and a final quantitative study. In this instance, the case study built on the theoretical constructs of situated learning, authentic problem-based learning and authentic assessment, as identified in the literature. It then interrogated the application and outcomes of these pedagogical approaches *in situ*.

As the research outcomes required in this final investigate stage were information-based, as opposed to insight-based, a quantitative survey strategy was employed. The outcome sought was a statistical evaluation of the approaches to teaching and learning, as detailed in the case study, from a student perspective.

Previous research undertaken amongst advertising students had sought to identify insights in relation to students' attitudes to the advertising course. The objective of this study was to both identify and quantify outcomes of teaching and learning methods within the situated learning environment of Kajulu Communications.

Data collection

The research instrument was a survey questionnaire. To ensure that the research addressed the relevant issues, initial interviews were undertaken with selected participants within the population to 'get a feel' for the issues before administering the questionnaire to the entire population. The survey utilized a Likert scale with questions worded and grouped by topic to ensure greater uniformity of response and to facilitate efficient data processing.

The population sampled consisted of the entire cohort of final year advertising students taught in Kajulu Communications and comprised 56 students in total. The survey was self-administered via distribution to the students during a normal class session.

Of a cohort of 56 students, 44 completed surveys were returned, representing 77 per cent of the population.

Data analysis

Surveys were collated and answers tabulated in terms of a calculated Item Mean. Overall, the survey identified confidence amongst students in the teaching and learning strategies employed. Responses confirmed that students believed that they were being well prepared to effectively and competitively enter the professional industry environment. Survey questionnaire responses are detailed in Research Project 2.

3.1.3 Research Project 3: Practitioner perspectives

This was the final research project in the series of three that collectively sought to identify the attributes and competencies of university graduates entering the international marketing communication industry. This project set out to review the current state of the industry nationally and internationally, and then to identify – by way of dialogue with international industry practitioners, academics and educators – insights into the development of graduate proficiencies to meet the demands of a changing industry landscape.

Theoretical orientation

A key difference between this research project and the first two projects was the identification of industry insights as they relate to both a national (Australian) and global industry environment, from the perspective of Australian and international industry practitioners, academics, educators and client companies.

Qualitative studies included:

- depth interviews with four (4) international industry practitioners;
- online recorded interviews with two (2) Australian industry practitioners.

Quantitative studies included:

- survey questionnaire administered to 16 attendees at a World Education Conference in the United States;
- an online survey distributed to 17 Advertising Federation of Australia accredited advertising agencies.

Qualitative research methodologies, specifically depth interviews with practitioners, used a coded thematic approach that was based on data gathered. The reflexive nature of this approach was particularly relevant, again given the researcher's own practitioner and academic background and experience as a university representative responsible for international student recruitment.

In support of the face-to-face and online interviews, questionnaires were used as an additional means of data gathering. In this instance, the approach offered a convenient method of interrogation, as the researcher had limited time and access to a population of international ‘experts’. Question types used in the questionnaire were based on the structured interview approach, with open-ended questions seen to be more suited to the qualitative ‘information and insights-gathering’ approach. This questioning approach allowed respondents to give a free response in continuous text. Open and axial coding was used with questionnaire responses to develop themes. These themes were then compared with those gathered from the other sources of data.

While the qualitative studies addressed international practitioner perspectives, it was also considered important to gain an Australian perspective. As the research outcomes sought were largely information-based, a quantitative survey model was employed as the foundation of the online questionnaire. However, considering the value in allowing respondents to ‘express their views’, a number of open-ended questions were also included.

Data collection

The project used a number of data collection methods. The first method was that of the *depth interview*. The decision to utilize a depth interview approach was based on two important considerations; access and the nature of the information required.

Depth interviews with international industry practitioners were conducted, with a question guide developed to ensure that areas of questioning were addressed consistently across all participants. Interviews were of 15 minutes duration and were audio-taped with the participant’s consent, and then transcribed verbatim. Assurance was provided that no interviewees would be identified.

The second method of data collection was by *survey*. A survey questionnaire comprising open-ended questions was distributed to academics and educators attending an International Advertising Educators’ Conference. Questions were framed to elicit insights and beliefs. The survey sought feedback in the areas of teaching, work-integrated learning, graduate

attributes and student internships and practicums. The survey was administered to academics representing a total of 15 international higher education institutions.

The final method of data collection was an *online survey* emailed to AFA-accredited advertising agencies in Australia this was developed in consultation with, and distributed with the full support of the Advertising Federation of Australia. Utilizing the AFA database, surveys were emailed to the human resource managers of agencies. The survey delivered a response rate of 30 per cent, providing a representative sample of the industry.

Data analysis

The approach taken to the analysis of the data was one of thematic analysis and coding. This process of data collection continued throughout the entire research project, from the initial review of the literature, through the interviews, and through survey processes.

Eleven specific categories emerged from the interview data. These categories were correlated with the seven categories that had emerged from the literature. From this correlation, three themes emerged which would provide a benchmark for comparison with the findings from the other research sources. These would eventually form the basis for the overall project findings.

The three themes emerging from this final of the three research projects, were as follows:

- (i) The skills shortage
- (ii) Industry trends
- (iii) Graduate requirements

Chapter 4 Research Project 1

4 Overview of the Project

This chapter of the exegesis provides an overview and explanation of the first research project. The project served as an introduction to the field of study and sought to identify graduate attributes and competencies in the marketing communication industry by way of the formalized process of an undergraduate advertising course review. To review the full research paper, refer to *Research Project 1* in Research Papers.

4.1 Context for the Project

Mass communication is experiencing unprecedented change. Technology has swept through the marketing communication industry faster than through most industries, including fellow communication disciplines such as public relations and journalism (Geimann, 2001). It is anticipated that, in accordance with Moore's Law (1965), this change will be expediential, as consumers race to embrace continually evolving new technologies, particularly in terms of the way that they receive information. Markets of all shapes and sizes are fragmenting, and at the same time, media have proliferated to such an extent that traditional ideas about consumers and media consumption habits are outdated.

The media landscape too has changed, and with it, strategies for effectively communicating with consumers (Winterberry Group, 2006). Newspapers, magazines, broadcasters, public relations and advertising agencies are experiencing the impact of this change. Expansion of the Internet and the world-wide web is providing readers and viewers with the power to gather all kinds of information that was once the domain of the professional communicators, when and where they desire it. As Waltz (2001) expresses it 'The fragmentation and proliferation of media, coupled with the growth of personal communication devices, is effectively shifting the gatekeeper function from the sender to the receiver.' This then raises issues relating to the notion of media and of media literacy. Two reports by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in 2007 shed light on today's technology-influenced generations.

The first, the *Australian Communications and Media Authority Media Literacy Report* (2007) suggests that ‘Media has a powerful influence on audiences in that it threatens civilization as we know it, and it manipulates audiences.’ The Report further suggests that now there is far greater recognition of media as an integral part of everyday lives, and that media literacy, *per se*, should prepare students for working competently with a range of media in different contexts of their everyday lives (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007, p.1).

The second report, the *Australian Communications and Media Authority Communications and Media in Australian Families Report* (2007), identifies that today Australian family households are technology-rich, with most families having three or more televisions, and three or more mobile phones (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007, p.1). The ACMA Media Literacy report (2007) agrees, confirming that digital access will become universal. The report confirms that currently 92 per cent of children between the ages of 5 and 14 years use computers, with 90 per cent of young teenagers now accessing the Internet (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007, p.2). It is apparent that technology in Australian households has changed dramatically in the last decade. In 1995, less than 10 per cent of Australian families had access to the Internet. In 2007, 90 per cent of families have an Internet connection, and seventy percent have access to broadband (p.5).

The Australian Communications and Media Report further identifies that Internet use by young people is primarily for ‘social reasons’ – the management of interpersonal relationships, identity building creative activities, and for learning. Time spent online varies with age. Children 8 to 12 years spend approximately one and one quarter hours online each day. This increases substantially for teenagers aged 15 to 17 years, who spend two and a half hours on line. A significant amount of this time online (45 minutes) is spent in personal communication – emailing, messaging and chatting. Social networking and user-generated content sites such as Facebook and Bebo account for just under a half an hour each day.

There is significant parental support for the Internet as a learning or educational medium in the home. Adults themselves are utilizing the Internet more within the home environment, as opposed to at work, as a means of gathering information on products and services and for e-commerce transactions (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007, p.8).

Technology and the proliferation of communication channels have had a significant effect on the structure of the marketing communication industry. Research by the Winterberry Group (2006) into the state of the marketing communication industry, and specifically the role of the advertising agency, found that the traditional marketing model was changing, and with it, the structure and indeed relevance of the 'traditional' advertising agency. This research identified that this was in line with changes in consumer technology habits, as families embraced a full range of electronic media and communication opportunities.

In recent years, we have witnessed the virtual disappearance of the full service agency and the rise of specialist agencies, and in particular, the media agency. In more recent times, we have seen the emergence of the digital agency. Industry observers go so far as to describe this as the most significant change to industry structure in decades.

As a result of this change to the industry structure, the role of the advertising agency itself is being challenged. Once considered pivotal to all marketing efforts, and trusted counselor to their clients, the advertising agency has now seen its portfolio of responsibilities eroded by the impact of non-traditional communication channels and by the emergence of specialist practitioners – creative agencies, media agencies, interactive and online agencies, management companies, strategic planning companies, as well as a proliferation of freelance consultants.

As this study has identified, up until the end of 2008 the shortage of qualified 'talent' –new entrants into the marketing communication industry – was by far the greatest challenge facing an industry that is notorious for its lack of formal training strategies. For media agencies in particular, broaden their service offerings and expertise beyond that of the traditional media company has meant that finding qualified staff has been their biggest

issue. CEO of leading international media company Mindshare, Chris Walton (2004) identified that there was a lack of training in the media environment, suggesting that ‘...no suitable courses or training are being provided at university level.’ Industry commentators suggest that, whilst academic achievement is important, employers now want students with ‘employability’ skills – graduates who can solve problems, show initiative and possess organization and self-management skills (Morris, 2004; Reeves, 2005; Tyler, 2005). ‘Technology keeps changing, so you need a graduate who is also an ongoing learner’ (Tarrant, 2005).

Not surprisingly, universities are under considerable pressure to equip graduates with the skills and capabilities required to manage the changing dynamics of the communication marketplace by developing and delivering programs that are both responsive to industry needs and pedagogically sound. However, whilst the literature is comprehensive in its reporting on the requirements of the marketing communication industry in terms of the skills and capabilities the agencies seek from new entrants into the industry, there is scant reference to the requirements of the client companies that employ the agencies.

Considering the growing divide between many agencies and their clients, and the concern expressed by these clients regarding the contemporary relevance of the skills and services of their agencies (Winterberry, 2006), research relating to the identification of graduate attributes and competencies in informing both course content and teaching and learning practice, must be inclusive of this key stakeholder group.

4.2 Objectives of the Project:

Undergraduate attributes and competencies in marketing communication: lessons learned from an advertising course review.

This first research project served as an introduction to the field and sought to identify undergraduate attributes and competencies in marketing communication by way of the formalised process of a university undergraduate advertising course review. A continuous process of consultation was initiated with the industry throughout the 12 month review

process from February 2006 to January 2007. Specifically, a program of depth interviews with leading industry practitioners, representatives of peak industry associations, and discipline-specific academic and teaching staff was undertaken to inform the review. Additionally, and as a critical component of the research process, an Industry Advisory Panel was constituted comprising representatives from the marketing communication industry. The objective of the course review was to identify opportunities for course improvement in terms of current and future industry requirements, and to advise on the implementation of the findings in the development of the new advertising course.

In line with the structural changes within the industry, an important outcome of the project was seen to be recognition of the need to inform curriculum in relation to the development of specific skills and proficiencies, in this case, in the emerging digital communications and channel communications environments.

4.2.1 Outcomes

From the research project, three themes emerged.

(i) Industry trends

The traditional industry model has changed and with it, the virtual disappearance of the ‘full service’ advertising agency. In its place, we have seen the emergence of specialist creative, media and digital agencies. Technology is the major driver in communication, as consumers enjoy unlimited access to information 24 hours a day. The adoption of the integrated marketing communication (IMC) model has seen blurring of discipline definitions and discipline skills, as specialists become multi-disciplinary ‘generalists’. From a consumer perspective, there is a lack of differentiation of communication mediums and of communication channels, and, as a result, media agencies in particular now seek ‘media neutral’ solutions to reach and impact their consumer target audiences.

There also appears growing signs of client dissatisfaction with the skills and services that traditional agencies are offering. Advertising agencies are seen to be stuck in yesterday’s paradigm (Sophocleous, 2007) and not responsive to the emerging needs of their clients and

to the changing consumer market. As a result of these changes, particularly in relation to the power of technology in communication, we are witnessing the growth in power and standing of the media agency. The research identifies that, as a result of this broad agency dissatisfaction, clients are now looking elsewhere for marketing communication solutions. They are creating relationships with a range of specialist providers – in digital and online media, direct and consumer relationship marketing, sales promotion, sports marketing and public relations – rather than using the one-stop full-service organization. As well, they are developing skills and proficiencies within their own organizations, specialist capabilities that were once the domain of the agency, further eroding the value and viability of the advertising agency.

(ii) Graduate requirements

People remain the greatest asset of the agency business (Biggs, 2008; Oliver, 2008). However the dynamic growth of the industry, and specifically the increasing role of and reliance on technology, has seen a shortage of appropriately qualified people entering the industry. Key graduate attributes sought by agency employers include the ability to be insightful, integrative and inventive (Spence-Stone & Byrne, 2004; Kerr & Proud, 2005; Waller, 2006). Integrated marketing communication (IMC) has created a requirement for graduates to be macro thinkers and problem solvers, to be multi-disciplinary generalists, not specialists, and to have the ability to think, not simply ‘create ads’. The research has identified that, from an industry perspective, employers want graduates who not only possess technical skills, but have sound employability skills. They seek graduates who can demonstrate initiative, possess organizational skills, self-management capabilities, and are able to display a commitment to on-going learning. At a technology-specific level, digital agencies in particular simply cannot recruit sufficient well educated, appropriately skilled graduates.

(iii) Course requirements

The biggest change and challenge facing the advertising industry is seen to be the proliferation of media and the convergence of media channels (Sophocleous, 2007). This is being largely driven by technology and fed by consumers’ appetites for information, on

their own terms. In acknowledging the proliferation of consumer communication channels, the research suggests that advertising and marketing communication courses need to increase their emphasis on integrated channel communication as a holistic strategy, by moving away from the notion of media as a siloed subject. Industry statistics confirm that by far the largest percentage of marketing communication expenditure is directed towards the ‘delivery’ of communication (Ad News, 2008). Therefore, a broader consideration of the role of channel communication across all aspects of an advertising/ marketing communication course should be considered to encourage students to think, not only about the creation of the message, but also about channel communication strategies for implementation and delivery of the message.

The application of concepts such as ‘work-integrated learning’ is seen as a way of improving education in media communication. Involvement with peak industry associations such as the Media Federation of Australia (MFA) in the development of channel communication subjects and content, specialist training in proprietary hardware and software, as well as innovative long-term industry internships within media agencies, is seen as advantageous in ensuring the effective transition from graduate to practitioner. Additionally, the changing demographics of the university graduate from “Generation Y” to “Generation Z”, coupled with their inherent familiarity with technology, suggests the broadening of not only the teaching of technology, but also the application of technology across all facets of the communication process.

Conclusion

Agency structures, the proliferation of communication channels, and consumer attitudes and behaviour have created a completely new marketing communication industry environment. As a result, there is a demand for a new type of industry practitioner, one who combines theoretical knowledge with practical, technical and people skills. Input from all industry stakeholders is essential in ensuring that university courses are both contemporary and relevant, and clearly address the stated needs of the industries that they serve in the development of appropriate graduate attributes and competencies.

The outcomes of this first research study have been incorporated into the 2008 Bachelor of Arts (Communication-Advertising) course at Charles Sturt University. Alliances developed with practitioners and agencies, as well as with the respective industry associations, have created positive environments for on-going research. Insights gained from this first study have framed the objectives and informed the methodologies for Research Projects 2 and 3.

4.3 Publications

The research formed the basis for the following publications:

- World educators and academics international education conference. Refereed paper published in the Conference Proceedings.

McCulloch, R. (2006). *Undergraduate attributes and competencies in marketing communications: lessons learned from an advertising course review*. 10th International Advertising Association World Education Conference Dubai, UAE March. www.iaaglobal.org

- World educators and academics international education conference. Refereed paper published in the Conference Proceedings.

McCulloch, R. (2008). *From the classroom to Kajulu and beyond: Strategies for teaching and learning marketing communications in the digital age*. 11th International Advertising Association World Education Conference Washington DC, April. www.iaaglobal.org

Chapter 5 Research Project 2

5 Overview of the Project

This chapter of the exegesis continues the research trajectory with an exploration of the methods in practice used to prepare students for the professions. It does this by benchmarking international practice and through an exploration of Australian and international marketing communication student perspectives. To review the full paper, refer to *Research Project 2* in Research Papers.

5.1 Context for the Project

Education is acknowledged as one of the fastest growing industries in the Asia-Pacific region (IAA, 2004). Countries including China, Korea and India have become a synonym for future growth. Differences identified between the Asian education system and those of the Australian system include the processing of data and the decision-making process. Experience indicates that, whilst China and other countries in the region are eager for western expertise, decision-making is cautious and considered. Success in establishing partnerships in the Asia Pacific region requires patience. 'It's about being consistent, steady and building confidence, and then the rewards will come' (Titterton, 2004).

As consumerism grows in the region so too does the requirement for marketing communication and the demand for practitioner expertise. Whilst European countries have taken decades to amass expertise in marketing communication, the Asia-Pacific region is developing these skills at an exponential rate. It is now recognized that, within the booming business and consumer marketplaces of this region, there is a significant demand for an international standard and a global approach to marketing communication education at university level. It is suggested that higher education is now more important than at any other time in the region's history (Marginson, 2007).

Australia's own higher education system has historically been influenced by the European, and to a lesser extent, the United States' models. However global communications and

mobility have created conditions for the emergence of an international market in higher education for Australia. Australia is geographically well positioned to take advantage of the growth in education in the Asia-Pacific region, and to provide an alternative to the US and Europe for Asian students wanting to enter Anglo-American programs. It is apparent that Australia has become far more engaged with South East Asian and Chinese education systems and institutions than with our British, American and European counterparts. In the process, Australia has become a desirable destination for Asian students looking to undertake an internationally recognised education.

The report by the Australian Government, the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (2008, p.xi) takes a slightly more pessimistic view of the Australian higher education sector and of our international influence. The report clearly identifies the importance of the higher education sector to our national economy, identifying that education services now represent our third largest export industry, with an international student population in Australia representing 25 per cent of all higher education students ‘making an enormous contribution to our economy, our relationships with the region and our demand for graduates.’ (Australian Government, 2008, p.xii).

Charles Sturt University has an established reputation in the international education sector. For many years the advertising course within the School of Communication at CSU has attracted significant numbers of international students from Malaysia, Korea, Singapore, Indonesia and Europe to complete their bachelor degrees in Australia. These associations developed with trans-national education providers provide a platform for the development and application of strategies for international student teaching and learning. Internationalism strengthens the quality of academia within the University and contributes to the calibre of learning of all students, be they international or indigenous, by creating a global community of scholars. Within the international marketing communication arena, this community of learning is beneficial.

Overseas study and a global learning experience is becoming one prerequisite for employment (Prospect Marketing, 2006). The traditional view of ‘internationalism’ has

been one of attracting overseas students to study in Australia, and the benefits have been considerable. Beyond the financial gains to the institution, and in turn to the Australia economy, Australian students have enjoyed the opportunity to associate with students from around the world and to learn in an international classroom environment. But what of Australian students studying overseas? In a study undertaken on the attitudes and perceptions of Australian employers towards an overseas study experience, 61 per cent of employers who were surveyed indicated that an overseas study experience was a positive on a graduate's resume, particularly if it focused on the student's area of expertise or related to the industry they were studying to enter (Prospect Marketing, 2006, p.2). According to the survey, in industries such as information technology, manufacturing, media and telecommunications:

Employers in these fields tend to look at an overseas experience as evidence of initiative and well-roundedness in a candidate, rather than as a period where that person has developed specific skills. (p.78)

Prospect Marketing, 2006

The survey highlighted the importance of internationalism and international 'experience' within the university curriculum and concluded that 'Future graduates of Australian universities have much to gain from undertaking an overseas study or internship experience' (Prospect Marketing, 2006, p.6).

5.2 Objective of the Project:

Preparing students for professional practice: benchmark strategies for international student teaching and learning

The purpose of this second research project was to investigate both national (Australian) and international perspectives in the development of strategies for international student teaching and learning, and specifically, the requirements for the provision of an internationally recognized degree program. The project sought to identify global trends and influences in education that could impact on the preparation of university graduates for successful assimilation into the international marketing communication industry. It highlighted the role of education in the Asia Pacific region, and specifically in the growth

countries of China, India and Korea, and sought to identify strategies for teaching and learning that could best prepare university graduates for industry participation.

The project considered the theoretical constructs of ‘situated learning’, ‘authentic assessment’ and ‘authentic problem-based learning’ within an industry-professional learning environment.

5.3 Outcomes of the Project

The project took as a case study the situated learning strategies employed at Charles Sturt University and overlaid this with an investigation of pedagogical practices within the industry-professional environment of an on-campus student advertising agency. The objective was to expand the body of knowledge relating to the concept of work-integrated learning as it applied to students in the final year of an advertising degree course.

Case Study

The research sought to evaluate the connection between teaching and learning strategies and student outcomes within an authentic problem-based learning environment, in this instance, Kajulu Communications. Australian and international students work on the development of industry-professional marketing communication campaigns of their clients in a simulated competitive agency environment. They are assessed both as teams and as individuals, with assessment based on established university and course assessment criteria. In addition, they are assessed by their clients, in line with recognised professional industry standards (AFA, 2008).

Pedagogical practices

The second component of this research project sought to identify student perceptions of the pedagogical practices employed in the teaching and learning environment of the student advertising agency. A Likert scale questionnaire sought responses over five question groups.

Details of the questions and responses may be found in the complete report of *Research Project 2* in Research Papers.

Conclusion

Evaluations from all stakeholders (industry, clients and students) involved in the teaching and learning process indicated that notions of internationalism and the integration of Australian and international students into agency teams is delivering a high standard of industry-ready graduate. The data from the quantitative research undertaken supports the notion that authentic problem-based learning (APBL) within the situated learning environment of Kajulu Communications has been successful.

Authentic problem-based learning as a concept was well accepted by the students and was seen as a valuable aid to their learning.

Situated learning within the student agency highlighted the development of mutual respect and collegiality as a valuable asset to the learning and professional growth of young practitioners. The student cohort took ownership of both their environment, the student agency, and of the work they produced for their clients.

They recognized that the overall Kajulu experience had a positive influence on *specific skills development*, in particular the development of essential professional and personal skills.

Future prospects for both Australian and international students were seen to have been enhanced by the experience of working for real clients in an authentic environment.

Australian students were found to be aware of the global industry perspective and accepting of ideas other than their own. International students suggested that the ‘internationalism’ of the student agency prepared them for assimilation into the industry when they returned home to the own countries. The survey did highlight one area that required improvement, that of *self-learning*. Responses indicated that more emphasis should be placed on assisting

students to take control of their own learning, possibly through additional consultation and more detailed feed-back.

5.4 Publications

The research formed the basis for the following publications and awards:

- World educators and academics international education conference. Keynote address.

McCulloch, R. (2007). *Preparing students for professional practice: benchmark strategies for international student teaching and learning*. QS Apple Asia Pacific World Leaders in Education Conference, Hong Kong, July. Conference Proceedings www.qsapple.com

- A referred paper presented to world academics and educators and published in the Conference Proceedings.

McCulloch, R. (2008). *Preparing students for professional practice: strategies for evaluating work integrated learning within an industry-professional context*. ACEN-WACE Asia Pacific Conference Sydney, September. Conference Proceedings www.acen-wace.com.au

- Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Citation:

For the application of marketing communication teaching and learning strategies, internationally recognized as a benchmark in the preparation of students for professional practice. Australian Teaching and Learning Committee, 2008.

- Charles Sturt University *Faculty of Arts Excellence in Teaching Award*, 2007.

Chapter 6 Research Project 3

6 Overview of the Project

This chapter of the exegesis provides an overview of the final research project. The project sought to align international practitioner and industry perspectives with the proficiencies identified as important in graduates of tertiary/university courses entering the marketing communication industry. The research drew on the findings of the first two projects in the development of objectives and research methodologies. To review the full research paper, refer to *Research Project 3* in Research Papers..

6.1 Context for the Project

Countries, economies, societies, ecology systems, and technologies world-wide are experiencing unprecedented change. This change is particularly evident in the marketing communication industry where we are witnessing changes in the traditional balance of power – from the marketer to the consumer – from the mainstream and traditional media to the non-traditional digital mediums – from the traditional advertising agency to the new generation of creative, media and digital agency – and from the agency to the client. Sophocleous (2007) believes that the speed of change in the marketing communication industry at this time is unprecedented. ‘The change in the balance of power between corporates and the public, changes in media consumption through technology, changes in the way advertising and media agencies are structured and paid, changes in the way these two types of agencies work together, changes in the way marketers communicate with their audiences, changes in recruitment, retention and remuneration of staff, changes in the agency expectations of clients, and clients of agencies...the list goes on and on.’

There is consensus that the marketing communication industry landscape is changing, and changing rapidly. The increasing power of the consumer in information-gathering and decision-making is one aspect of this change. The other aspect relates to the media, and the wide range of communication vehicles and channels now available to provide information, and to inform decision-making. Given the findings of the first two research projects, and

supported by current commentary in the industry press, it is apparent that the most important change facing the industry now is the changing face of the industry practitioner – younger, more technology-literate, and more demanding in both what he or she wants from their profession, and how they want to live their lives.

The industry would appear to be in a state of flux. Some commentators (Sophocleous, 2007) are asking ‘What does the agency of the future look like? Is it client-driven? Consumer focused? Media neutral? Creatively led? Digitally enhanced? Or all of the above!’ The real question may well be: Will the agency of the future be a media agency that has turned its hand to creative, or a creative agency trying to retain a full-service role? Or, will it be a virtual entity that taps into specialist resources as and when they are required?

CEO of leading international media organization OMD, Mark Coad believes that the ‘great divide’ of the early 2000s between creative and media agencies will never be resolved, and that the media agencies will only get stronger as they broaden their service offerings to their clients to include strategic support to compliment media planning and purchasing activities (Coad, 2008). Along with the rise of the media agency, the industry has also witnessed the advent of yet another new player in the market – the digital agency. It is expected that, with the growth in commitment to digital and online marketing activities, digital agencies will play a more centralized and influential role on client agency rosters.

World advertising group EURO RSCG believes that the biggest trend affecting today’s marketing world is, as they term it, ‘Being good is good’. EURO RSCG suggests that practitioners need to change to suit the evolving environment, to ‘adapt or die’ – to be accountable, play to their strengths, foster integration in communication and attract the very best people (IAA, 2008).

Leach and Leach (2007) suggest that the marketing communication industry needs to re-think how it can evolve to meet the needs of a changing client and consumer landscape. They suggest that this may see a morphing of skills, making it difficult to confine any

agency to a single model. ‘Advertising agencies will employ digital strategists, product companies will hire creatives, and media agencies will create joint ventures with multiple disciplines to expand their professional offerings’ (Leach & Leach, 2007).

As identified in a study by McCulloch (2007), from an educational point of view there is a requirement to ensure that the content of discipline-specific courses such as marketing communication is both absolutely current and comprehensive, and takes into account contemporary conditions and the employment requirements of the industry. For universities charged with the responsibility of preparing graduates for effective participation in the industry, this situation presents significant challenges. Do graduate skills align with the expectations of the agencies, the employers of graduates? Or, considering the sometimes tenuous relationship between agency and client, should universities seek the input of the client companies that employ these agencies? Where does the university curriculum focus – on strategy, on creative, or on media? Or does it focus on all of these? Does it concentrate on preparing graduates to be multi-skilled creative thinkers, with curricula to support both theoretical and practical learning?

6.2 Objectives of the Project

Identification and alignment of graduate proficiencies in marketing communication: industry insights

Accepting that marketing communication is a global industry, and the role of universities is to prepare graduates for effective participation in the industry, the objective of this final research project was to identify international industry and practitioner perspectives. It sought to achieve this by firstly reviewing the current state of the marketing communications industry environment in Australia and internationally, and then to identify insights into the development of graduate proficiencies that are in line with a changing global marketing communication industry landscape and identified industry requirements.

The project combined an initial review of both the contemporary literature and current industry commentary with a survey of international educators. The process included interviews with leading international industry practitioners representing both advertising

agencies and client companies attending an international advertising and education conference in Washington DC in April 2008.

6.3 Outcomes of the Project

Research for this project was undertaken in Australian and overseas. Research comprised both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and comprised four individual investigations.

Reviewing each investigation:

(i) & (ii) Depth interviews with both Australian and international practitioners

From the interviews three key issues relating to the current state of the industry were identified.

(i) Skill shortage

The marketing communication industry is experiencing a shortage of skilled practitioners and the penetration and influence of new technologies, and in particular interactive media referred to as Web 2.0, is demanding specific skills of the people who work in the industry.

(ii) Industry trends

The greatest single change to the marketing communication agency landscape in recent years has been the demise of the traditional 'full service' agency and the emergence of the creative and media agency. Media agencies in particular are now developing stronger strategic alliances and adopting commanding leadership roles with clients.

One new organisational model that has recently emerged is the 'small is beautiful' model, a strategic hub that sees smaller companies with specific skills and talents combining for the purpose of representing a client with specialist requirements.

(iii) Graduate requirements

The requirement is to equip graduates with skills to meet the dynamic nature of an evolving industry. It is apparent from studies undertaken into the identification of graduate attributes

that the greater the cooperation between universities and employers (in this instance, citing the agencies), the greater the benefits to graduates. This suggests that joint programs developed between universities and agencies – including practical scholarships, internships and graduate trainee programs – would be advantageous and would be seen as an investment in the cooperative growth of the industry. However, consideration should be given to the inclusion of client organisations in university/industry programs.

(iii) Outcomes from the survey of international educators added an academic point of view

The survey indicated that critical thinking, excellent communication skills and team work were the key professional attributes sought in graduates. These were supported by the personal attributes of hard work, ethical behaviour, and an ability to be a critical thinker and an effective communicator. Teaching strategies favoured included ‘real-world’ client projects and group work that introduced students to professional practice. These were seen to be contributors to the development of high-end professional skills and proficiencies that served to enhance graduate employability. Technical skills identified by respondents included written and basic computer skills.

However, whilst basic computer skills were nominated as important, there was no mention of digital skills, suggesting that either they were of little importance to educators or that educators were not aware of current industry focus on these skills as a result of emerging media technologies.

Industry experience

Industry internships were seen as important by just 40 per cent of the international educators surveyed. The remaining 60 per cent suggested that practical industry experience such as mandatory industry internships was not a component of their curriculum. Linkmen (2008) an online employment survey site indicated that employers actually found fault in those universities’ ability to produce graduates with hands-on skills who did not display a commitment to programs such as internships.

(iv) An online survey of AFA accredited advertising agencies in Australia

To gain an Australian perspective, the final component of the research project was an online survey of Advertising Federation of Australia accredited advertising agencies. This was developed with the endorsement of the AFA and distributed to their proprietary online database to better understand the commitment to training practices and attitudes to education within Australian agencies.

Findings supported the outcomes of previous research undertaken, in that the agencies identified that the greatest need for skills growth was in the digital area. When asked what specific skills they sought in a university graduate, respondents indicated that an understanding of the technological environment and everyday use of technology was essential.

Respondents identified their principal requirements as:

- greater consultation between agencies and educational institutions;
- more practical, less theoretical, face-to-face discussions between universities and agencies;
- internships and work placements to get graduates into a 'real' working environment; and
- mentoring schemes to ensure that graduates are exposed to all aspects of agency operations.

Conclusion

The marketing communication industry is experiencing a skills shortage of appropriately educated and prepared practitioners. Specifically, there is a shortage of people who embrace digital technology and possess digital proficiencies. Essential skills identified by agencies and clients included superior communication and analytical skills, and the ability to apply critical thinking to effective creative executions to a tech-savvy consumer. There was agreement that agency and education needed to work together.

Considering the outcomes of the study, this situation should be seen as an opportunity for universities to re-focus curricula and develop programs that will prepare graduates for the realities of the changing industry. Educational programs should embrace both practitioner-specific skills and broader business and communication skills. There does, however, remain concern from within the industry and that is that universities may not be totally in touch with the changing requirements of the industry.

Notions of social complexity relating specifically to the changing structures of traditional networks such as have existed in the marketing communication industry, the changes in interaction of participants in the industry, and changes in cultural behavior brought about through the emergence of social media have fostered changes in the industry. This is most apparent in the division of media and creative agencies. Client requirements too are changing the nature and structure of agencies. The growing dominance of technology and the fragmentation of communication channels have seen clients turning away from the 'one-stop-shop' to smaller specialist communication providers as a means of gaining access to a greater range of services and expertise, and for a perceived better return on their investment. As a result, smaller specialist agencies are now working on the larger client accounts that were once the sole domain of the larger agencies. This is creating opportunities for new professionals with new skills to enter what was once a traditional agency and mainstream media-dominated market.

In light of these changes, graduate skills and competencies must change to meet new industry demands. However, sections of the industry and the client community appear somewhat disillusioned with both the quality of university graduates and their abilities to assimilate into the work environment. There is some criticism of the university sector and its ability to effectively prepare graduates to operate outside the classroom. As a result, peak industry bodies such as the Advertising Federation of Australia and the Media Federation of Australia are adopting strategies and implementing formal programs to train new practitioners, early career workers, in the practicalities of their industries. Additionally, 'Generation Y' is applying pressure on employers, demanding both a quality of professional and personal life that the retiring baby-boomers never considered.

Universities too are experiencing significant change. Whilst retaining essential pedagogical standards, it is apparent that the university education model must embrace the notions of practice-based and work integrated-learning in, based on comprehensive stakeholder input, and in the development of graduate skills and proficiencies required to meet the demands of a changing marketing communication industry.

6.4 Publications

The research currently forms the basis of a paper to be for presented at the 2009 *QS Apple Asia Pacific Leaders in Education Conference* in Kuala Lumpur in November.

Chapter 7 Themes within the Study

7 Introduction

In this chapter of the exegesis themes emerging from the literature and from the investigations undertaken in the three individual research studies that comprise this project are detailed.

Research Project 1: Industry investigation

A number of key themes emerged from a review the literature and from interviews with advertising and media agency executives and representatives from peak advertising and media industry associations, including the Advertising Federation of Australia, the Media Federation of Australia, the International Advertising Association, and the Australian Association of National Advertisers. These are identified in Table 3.

Themes	Main Categories
a. Industry trends	Traditional advertising Today's advertising Emerging industry trends Integrated marketing communication (IMC) Agency structural changes Business landscape
b. Graduate requirements	Role of the practitioner Consumer control Consumer treatment
c. Course requirements	Employment Staff employment Education The CSU course

Table 3: Research Project 1 - Emerging themes and their categories

Research Project 2: International strategies

Themes emerging from a review of the literature, a case study on the outcomes of situated learning and authentic problem-based learning in an on-campus student advertising agency, and a survey of final year advertising students are detailed in Table 4.

Themes	Main Categories
a. International education	Global industry Alliance with Asia Pacific region Trans-national education Internationalism of course/university
b. Professional work environments	Team work Specialist skills Industry experience Industry knowledge Real world clients/experience Presentation skills Personal skills/confidence Authentic assessment Preparation for employment
c. Pedagogy	Authentic problem-based learning Situating learning Self learning Specific skills development Future prospects

Table 4: Research Project 2 - Emerging themes and their categories

Research Project 3: Practitioner perspectives

Themes emerging from a review of the literature, interviews with international agency practitioners and representatives of client organizations, a survey of international academics and educators, a survey of Australian medium-sized agencies, and an online survey of the Advertising Federation of Australia database of accredited advertising agencies are detailed in Table 5.

Themes	Main Categories
a. Skills shortage	Craft skills Tenacity in finding new solutions Understanding of digital Specialists in e-commerce Strategic thinkers Willingness to work hard
b. Industry trends	Specialist agencies Digital integration Media/creative agency division Media agency dominance Agency treated as 'supplier' Demise of 'one-stop-shop' Low commitment to training
c. Graduate requirements	Digital knowledge Interpersonal skills Good communication skills Flair for internet-based work Analytical thinking Fresh ideas Discipline specific knowledge Knowledge of methods and tools Significant practical experience

Table 5: Research Project 3 - Emerging themes and their categories

7.1 Major themes identified

From the three individual research projects, nine categories and 53 sub categories emerged.

From the correlation of the findings of these three projects, three overall themes emerged.

Table 6 identifies these themes and categories.

Themes	Main Categories	Sub Categories
a. Industry Trends	Agency structural changes	Specialist agencies Media / creative agency division Media agency dominance Demise of the 'one-stop-shop'
	Emerging industry trends	Traditional advertising Today's advertising Integrated marketing communication (IMC) Digital integration Agency treated as 'supplier' Low commitment to training
	Skills shortage	Craft skills Tenacity Understanding of digital Specialists in e-commerce Strategic thinkers Willingness to work hard
b. Graduate Requirements	Digital knowledge	Flair for internet-based work
	Personal skills	Good communication skills Interpersonal skills Analytical thinking Fresh ideas
	Discipline specific knowledge	Knowledge of methods and tools Significant practical experience Role of the practitioner Staff employment
c. Education	International education	Global industry Alliance with Asia Pacific region Trans-national education International cohort of students Internationalism of the course

Professional work environments	Team work Specialist skills Industry experience Industry knowledge Real world clients/experience Presentation skills Personal skills/confidence Authentic assessment Preparation for employment
Pedagogy	Problem-based learning Situating learning Self learning Specific skills development Future prospects

Table 6: Major themes identified

7.2 Emergent themes

From this study – a combination of three individual yet interconnected research projects – three predominant themes emerge:

- (i) Industry Trends
- (ii) Graduate Requirements
- (iii) Education.

The research clearly identifies that the marketing communication industry is undergoing significant change. This has been brought about by a combination of evolving technologies and consumer behaviour, as well as by a fundamental change in the very structure of the companies (agencies) involved in it. These changes are exemplified in the findings characterized in the first theme.

(i) Industry Trends

Agency structural changes are redefining the profile of the industry. These changes are amplified by the development of new trends in communication that are designed to meet the demands of a consumer-driven market and in the growth of specialist providers to meet these demands. In recent years these structural industry changes have been most apparent in the emergence and dominance of the media agency and in the growth of specialist agencies such as the digital agency. The growth of these new industry entities has resulted in a skills

shortage of specialist people who have been educated to the new communications world and have both the hands-on skills and the ‘soft skills’ necessary to contribute. The digital area in particular has seen a shortage of new skilled practitioners.

Compounding the skills shortage is the reality that today’s young professionals, predominantly ‘Generation Y’, don’t readily display the work ethic associated with those of previous generations. Combined, these factors suggest an industry that is not sufficiently in touch with the demands of today’s marketing communication environment, and one that is in need of new leadership and direction.

(ii) Graduate Requirements

The second theme clearly identifies the key attributes sought by today’s industry, and provides a ‘checklist’ for curriculum content and teaching and learning strategies in educational institutions. The findings underline the importance of the marketing communication industry and education institutions working together to a common goal: the preparation of appropriately educated, work-ready graduates.

The research clearly identifies three categories within this theme. The first relates to the need for graduates to be digitally-competent. There are no real surprises here as it is obvious that we live in a digitally-driven world. It does however reinforce the fact that graduates have to be comfortable and capable working in this environment.

It has been said that advertising is an ‘ideas’ business. However, the ability to think clearly and analytically and to be able to communicate professionally both orally and by use of the written word is for marketing communication professionals, fundamental personal skills. These cannot be overlooked or de-emphasised within a course curriculum. For, while it is recognized that technology is leading us into new and different ways of communicating, including abbreviated texting and SMS-ing, skills in the traditional areas of oral and visual communication remain vital.

Additionally, the value of work-integrated learning models employed within the curriculum are reinforced in the findings which highlight that real industry knowledge, combined with practical experience gained whilst still at university, is crucial.

(iii) Education

What is not apparent from the many discussions with the various stakeholders in the industry undertaken during the course of this study, yet is clearly apparent in the literature and in the specific findings of this research project, is the importance to the marketing communication industry of this third theme – education. Education needs to be both well informed and formalized in that it specifically addresses both the identified needs of the industry today, and is predictive of the requirements of the industry of tomorrow.

The value of internships and work experience, as well as international experience, is highlighted as being important to employers and is seen as providing an ‘edge’ in the employment of one graduate applicant over another. Internationalism of the curriculum too is identified as important. Marketing communication is a global industry, hence exposure to global industry knowledge and trends as well as an ability to work in an international environment, is cited as critical in the development of the practitioner. Professional learning environments that replicate real-world working environments are seen as important in assisting in the preparation of students who are better equipped for the workplace. These environments foster the development of practitioner skills, team work skills, presentation skills, and practical industry knowledge. By providing real-world marketing communication problems for students to work on they help facilitate a seamless transition from university to industry.

This study provides insights into the state of the industry and the importance of the inclusion of all stakeholders in the identification of graduates attributes and competencies. It also reinforces the notion that practice-based education is relevant and important in equipping graduates with the skills necessary for successful participation in the changing marketing communication industry.

Chapter 8 Conclusion and Recommendations

8. Conclusion

In this final chapter of the exegesis, a summary of findings of the study is presented, as well as recommendations emerging from these findings. These recommendations are presented to inform undergraduate course curriculum and professional education teaching and learning strategies in the development of graduate attributes and competencies for the marketing communication industry.

8.1 Summary of findings

Findings from the three individual research projects clearly indicate that the marketing communication industry is undergoing its greatest period of change in decades, in an economic climate that is the toughest in decades (Bastholm, 2009). Research suggests that the industry is changing as a result of a combination of new technologies and increasing consumer power, and that this is compounded by a shortage of skilled talent.

This study identifies the emergence of three predominant themes: *Industry Trends*, *Graduate Requirements* and *Education* – changes in the industry, the skills and attributes required by the ‘new’ industry, and the teaching and learning strategies within educational institutions required to ensure that graduates are appropriately skilled and equipped to enter the workforce.

Of the three key themes identified, the issues of new technologies, consumer power, the change in agency dynamics, as well as the shortage of skilled practitioners, are encapsulated in the first theme – *Industry trends*. The research clearly shows that the industry is changing dramatically. Some of the change is evolutionary – including the growth and influence of technology and the proliferation of communication channels – while other changes may be considered revolutionary. This change is most noticeable in the split in the traditional agency structure with the emergence of the creative agency and the media agency, and the growing dominance of the media agency in the client / agency

relationship. These structural changes are having a significant impact on the industry today, for they not only define the new profile of the industry and of the companies involved, they re-define the essential attributes and competencies of practitioners. The effect of these industry changes is manifested in a shortage of new and appropriately skilled people in the workforce. This situation has been compounded by the speed of the change and, as the research identifies, by the fact that little has done to prepare for change. There has been minimal commitment to training within the industry. Few agencies have established dedicated in-house training programs for staff to meet the new skill requirements, and fewer still have strategies in place to counter the imminent departure of the “baby boomer” generation from the workforce.

As the research also reveals the industry, and in particular the traditional advertising agencies, has continued to operate in ‘yesterday’s paradigm’. It has resisted change principally because of the impact change would have on established business and remuneration structures. However agency clients have embraced change and many have moved their business to alternative organisations. These moves have accelerated the structural changes in the industry. These changes have encouraged the growth in dominance of the media agencies and have seen the emergence of a range of smaller, specialised providers, including digital agencies. They have also accentuated the divide between agencies and clients, and have fostered concern by clients in the ability of their agencies to deliver the required people skills and technical skills, knowledge and services. As a result, traditional advertising agencies appear to be struggling in a changing and challenging market of diminishing revenues and disenchanted clients.

In the last few years this situation has reached a crisis point for many in the industry. For agencies, the loss of their main source of revenue – that of the planning and purchasing of media to the specialist media agency, compounded by the growth in power of the media agency in the client-agency relationship – has forced a rethink of business strategy. This study clearly identifies that the industry, and in particular the media agencies, due to their accelerated growth and increasing demands of their clients, is now recognizing the need for specifically skilled people and is hurriedly implementing specialist training programs for

their staff. In addition, they are now focusing on the recruitment of a new generation of marketing communication professionals. As well as developing in-house training programs, the more pro-active agencies are seeking to create relationships with educational institutions to ensure that graduates leave these institutions with the appropriate attributes and competencies.

However, demand for qualified staff has been tempered by the pressures of a tougher global economic climate and business environment. A reduction in industry positions and the focus on employing only those best qualified suggests that the quality of graduates leaving educational institutions now and in the future needs to be of a very high standard. For graduates to be successful in gaining employment in an industry and in an employment market that, post 2008, is under significant pressure, graduate attributes and competencies need to be in line with, as Bastholm (2009) defines it, 'the future of advertising'.

The second theme identified, that of *Graduate requirements*, reinforces the importance of both the marketing communication industry and the educational institutions working together with a common goal. The research clearly identifies three areas of focus: digital knowledge, personal skills, and discipline-specific knowledge. The first area of focus relates to the need for graduates to be digitally-aware. Technology is clearly identified as one of the key drivers of today's marketing communication industry. Graduates must leave universities with an appropriate level of technological skill to be able to work in this environment. This suggests that the development of digital skills should be mandatory and comprehensive within course curricula.

It is apparent that media agencies in particular, are struggling to find appropriately prepared graduates. It is also clear from the research that the expectations of skill requirements of agencies and client companies are not always synergistic. Consideration should be given to educating students with an understanding of the 'business of advertising', and how this relates to both agency needs and client requirements. These skills should include an understanding of the role of the practitioner in a client-agency relationship, the ability to think proactively, to reflect, to be inclusive, and to communicate effectively.

The final theme emerging from the study is one of *Education*. What is not apparent from the many discussions with the various stakeholders in the industry, yet is clearly evident in the specific findings of the research, is the importance to the industry of tertiary education that is well informed and clearly identifies the needs of the changing industry. Additionally, the role of professional education must be considered from the point of view of all stakeholders – the universities, the agencies and the clients. The research suggests that an international perspective is also important, and that this may be achieved through both curriculum content and practical work placements, including overseas internships. Considering the limited commitment to in-house training by many agencies, and the current contraction of employment opportunities, the ability of universities to comprehensively prepare graduates for entry into the industry is considered absolutely essential.

8.2 The way forward

This study clearly identifies two key issues that must be addressed by educational institutions in terms of future curriculum development.

(i) Input into curriculum development by all stakeholders

Research into the identification of graduate attributes and competencies to date has focused only on the needs of the direct employers of these graduates, the agencies. The influence of the client organizations on agency structures and staffing has been largely overlooked in previous studies. With agencies tending to act as pseudo-gatekeepers, what has been missing in previous studies and ensuing recommendations is **direct dialogue between the educational organisations and client organizations**.

As Diagram 2 illustrates, until now consultation has only taken place between the educational institutions (the universities) and the direct employer of graduates (the agencies). What this study clearly identifies is that consultation and interaction must be inclusive of all stakeholders, and this means the client companies. Three-way dialogue is critical in the development of curricula and content, and is imperative for the identification of graduates attributes and competencies, and for graduate employment.

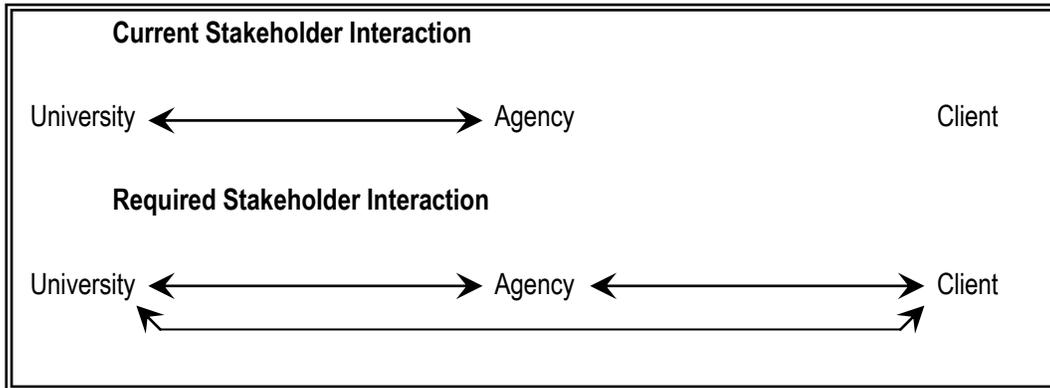


Diagram 2: Stakeholder Interaction

In addressing the question of changing graduates attributes and competencies, the study reveals that currently:

- there is no consultation with client organisations on the part of the educational institutions in the development of curricula and graduate education strategies;
- there is concern regarding the credibility of the inputs from the agencies in the development of practice-based education. Agencies are seen by many client companies to be out of touch with the realities of the changing industry environment and the commercial world in which they operate;
- educational institutions rely almost totally on consultation with agencies, and in some instances, with the peak agency representative bodies, in the development of courses curricula and content.

8.2.1 Recommendations

From this study, the following recommendations may be made:

- graduates from marketing communication courses need to be made aware of, and become familiar with, the new industry structures and dynamics – from both an agency and client perspective – whilst still at university;

- graduates need to be prepared to think clearly about where they wish to work and what specific skills they need to develop. Importantly, they need to have ‘clear expectations of their starting roles so that (agencies) can manage them when they start their careers’ (Maloney, 2009);
- university course developers need to work in consultation with all stakeholders in the industry in curricula and course development.

Specifically, there must be:

- cooperation in the development of practiced-based curricula via the establishment of curriculum advisory committees within university marketing communication courses to inform course content and to undertake regular course reviews. Committees would include representatives from the university, the agencies and from the clients companies;
- provision of work-integrated learning spaces that replicate those found in industry;
- application of ‘authentic assessment’ practices for project assessments. These should include professional assessment of student activity by agencies and by clients;
- provision of professional learning resources, including access to industry practitioners and skills development in the use of proprietary industry software programs;
- access to current industry information and measurement data;
- availability of university scholarships from creative, media and digital agencies to encourage students to develop specialist skills. Scholarships could include work placements that lead to eventual employment;
- provision of mandatory internship programs and practicums in the industry to develop student skills and competencies in the workplace environment – both in advertising agencies (creative and media) and in client organizations;

- internship placement programs that provide formal industry feedback and internship data that can help inform the development of contemporary student attributes and competencies; and
 - development of pathways within marketing communication courses for students to ‘articulate’ into agencies for practicum-based learning during their final year. This would allow students to identify and then pursue opportunities in areas/disciplines of choice.

- the industry, and in particular, the peak representative bodies such as the Advertising Federation of Australia, the International Advertising Association, the Media Federation of Australia and the Australian Association of National Advertisers (the client body) need to develop alliances with agencies and with universities to ensure:
 - the application of ‘industry best practice’ to teaching models;
 - access to the latest national and international information and intelligence to inform course curriculum; and
 - student access to industry and practitioner events.

- recognising that marketing communication is a global industry, course curriculum should include education in international marketing communication, and provide:
 - opportunities for overseas student placements, including internships and practicums in international agencies and client organizations;
 - encouragement for students from overseas to study side by side with Australian students;
 - interaction with educators from other countries through participation in international industry and academic conferences; and
 - opportunities for students to interact with the industry on an international basis via participation in international student marketing communication competitions.

Considering the evolving economic environment, the Australian Government's expectations of higher education and the changing structure of the marketing communication industry, the challenge for educators is to produce graduates who are industry-ready, not just agency-ready, with the attributes and competencies required to add value for their employer – from day one.

8.3 Limitations of the study and future research directions

The study considers the evolving economic climate and the impact on both consumerism and graduate employment in the marketing communication industry, primarily within an Australian context. While the opinions of a number of international educators and practitioners have been sought and recorded, caution should be exercised in 'internationalising' the results. The international representation of practitioner respondents is relevant and important; however the size of the sample of practitioners interviewed is limited and reflects the opinions of individuals that may not automatically be considered representative of their countries' industry and educational environments. It is acknowledged that marketing communication is a global industry; therefore further research that builds on these initial findings via the robust measure of international opinions would enhance educators' knowledge in effectively preparing university graduates for entry into a global marketing communication industry.

There are a number of other limitations of the present study that should also be addressed. For example, in terms of response rates, the study focuses more on creative and media agency industry requirements than on those of the client organisations. The study does however uncover a significant divide in the opinions of agencies and client companies in terms of the breadth and quality of the services required and provided by agencies. It clearly identifies a lack of recognition amongst agencies that they are in fact service companies and that, if they fail to fulfill their purpose in both meeting (and exceeding) the demands of their clients, they risk remaining relevant. This suggests that ongoing research into the specific requirements of client companies would be valuable in informing a successful client/agency relationship.

Having established a foundation of agency opinion from which to work, future research could build on this by more broadly seeking client opinions on how both agencies and clients could better work together with universities in the development of appropriately prepared graduates who meet the needs of all stakeholder groups in a dynamic marketing communications environment. In the process, the gap in expectation between client and agency could be narrowed as both groups collaborate in providing opportunities for university students to gain workplace experience ‘on both sides of the fence’. That is, in agencies as well as in the marketing and promotional departments of client companies. It may be suggested that the current internships and work placement programs inherent in most university degree courses could be expanded to ensure that students experience a more comprehensive stakeholder perspective, one that would see them working in both agencies and client organisations. Further research could encourage stakeholder collaboration by firstly benchmarking the initial expectations of such programs, and then reporting on graduate outcomes as a result of these programs, to inform continuous course development.

With the increasing power of the consumer in purchase decision-making, the influence of technology through evolving mediums such as the web and social media, and the increasing role client companies are themselves playing in the planning and execution of marketing communication campaigns, the challenge will be to ensure that graduate attributes and competencies reflect the expectations of all stakeholder groups.

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Note: The American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style is used in this exegesis. Research papers included in the dissertation / portfolio adhere to the referencing styles stipulated by the papers' publishers.

Research Papers

Complete papers from the three (3) research projects are as follows:

1. *Undergraduate attributes and competencies in marketing communications: lessons learned from an advertising course review.*
2. *Preparing students for professional practice: benchmark strategies for international student teaching and learning.*
3. *Identification and alignment of graduate proficiencies in marketing communication: industry insights.*

Undergraduate attributes and competencies in marketing communications: lessons learned from an advertising course review.

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Abstract

With the advent of new technologies and greater accesses to information by consumers, the marketing communication environment is experiencing an unprecedented 'velocity of change'. Acknowledging this and the need to ensure that our academic programs meet the vocational needs of the industries we serve, every five years the advertising course at Charles Sturt University undergoes rigorous review to ensure the relevance of course objectives, as well as the currency of strategies and content. Whilst much has been written in the literature concerning vocational teaching practices, and to a lesser extent graduate attributes (Waller et al, 2003; Kerr & Proud, 2005), there appears minimal documentation that specifically identifies what educational skills will be required by both the direct employer advertising agencies and the client organisations that employ these agencies. This paper firstly sets out to review the state of marketing communications education – are teaching and learning strategies in line with evolving industry requirements – then to identify specific strategies and content for a contemporary advertising program that is both practitioner focused and pedagogically sound, one that is in line with the demands of both the Australian and international marketing communications industry.

1. Introduction

Universities are under increasing pressure from both employers and students to equip graduates with real world skills and capabilities. Teaching and learning strategies are changing as the contemporary view of education is to prepare students for assimilation into professional practice (McCulloch, 2005). As Morris (2005) indicates, it is becoming apparent that employers are seeking qualifications beyond the academic degree. They want hands-on skills, employees who are good communicators, team players and are dedicated to life-long learning. Berryman (1990) reinforces this point, suggesting that the ultimate point of education is to prepare students for effective functioning in non-school settings.

In the five years since my appointment at Charles Sturt University as a senior lecturer in Advertising and as course coordinator for the BA (Communication-Advertising) degree, my strategy has been to close the gap between the classroom and the professional community by offering both a teaching curriculum and a learning environment that provides a seamless transition from university into the professional workplace, the objective being to comprehensively prepare students for the rigors of the industry that they are entering and to ensure their employability. In the process, the development of the

curriculum and pedagogy has been informed and guided through reflection on my own experiences, firstly a practitioner and now as an academic and by gaining an explicit understanding of what is required by the industry we serve. It is apparent that strategies must continually evolve to keep pace with the dynamic nature of the marketing communications industry. In 2002, I undertook a comprehensive review of the Charles Sturt University undergraduate Advertising course. This review resulted in the introduction of new subjects and the development of content to bring the course into line with then industry requirements. In 2005 the BA (Communication-Advertising) course was acknowledged as 'Nationally Outstanding' by the Council of Australian Universities. Today, the Advertising course at Charles Sturt University is recognized by the industry's peak body, the International Advertising Association as a global benchmark for advertising teaching and learning strategies (IAA, 2005).

Every five years the Advertising course undergoes rigorous review. This paper reports on the 2007 course review, the continuous consultation process with the industry throughout the review period and the qualitative research program of depth interviews with leading industry practitioners undertaken to inform this review. The over-arching objective of the review was to identify opportunities for course improvement in terms of current and future industry requirements, specifically those of graduate attributes for employment. The paper considers firstly the current state of the marketing communications environment, then progresses to identify future trends and influences in line with the overall review. In the process, the paper seeks to identify core student skills and attributes inherent in an advertising program that is both responsive to industry needs and is pedagogically sound.

2. The State of the Industry

Mass communications are experiencing what I refer to as a *velocity of change*. The industry is being transformed by rapid changes in technology which in turn are pressuring practitioners to speed-up adaptation, and the academy to keep up with industry developments.

As Geimann (2001) notes, newspapers, magazines, broadcasters, public relations and advertising agencies are changing. Expansion of the Internet and the world-wide web is providing readers and viewers with the power to gather all kinds of information, once the domain of the professional communicators - journalists and other mass media practitioners. Online access by consumers has made reaching a mass audience, promoting a brand or company image, or selling a product more difficult for the marketer. Quite simply there has been a quantum shift in power – from the marketer to the consumer. Now the consumer has access to information, 24/7. As Chairman of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Arthur Waltz identifies "...the fragmentation and proliferation of media, coupled with the growth of personal communication devices is effectively shifting the gatekeeper function from the sender to the receiver." (2001).

Forty years ago marketing communications was dominated by above-the-line advertising, specifically television, radio, newspapers, magazines and to a lesser extent, outdoor

advertising. Even ten years ago, these mediums maintained a strangle-hold on marketing communications budgets, accounting for 75% of advertising spends. Today, the equation is vastly different. Today, around 40% goes into what we would refer to as ‘mainstream’ advertising, whilst 60% goes into below-the-line activities – about 50% into direct and sales promotions and sponsorships and 10% into interactive marketing (Kitchen, 2003). This has created a complete upheaval in the way media is presented, the process now being driven, not by the way marketers desire to impact consumers, but rather by the way consumers choose to receive information. This change of balance in the marketer/consumer relationship has meant a complete re-think on what comprises media and a need to better understand the dynamics of consumer communication.

The current communications mix

Category	Expenditure %
Media advertising	40.0
Sales promotion	16.2
Brand PR/Sponsorship	15.0
Direct mail/response	20.0
Interactive marketing	7.8

Table 1: CIPR UK expenditure categories 2004

Underlying the changes in the communications mix, and the evolving new relationships shared by agencies and their clients are a number of developments stemming from technological, financial and cultural shifts. These have had a material impact on the advertising and marketing communication landscape and on the services offered and the skills of practitioners. In a survey conducted by Winterberry Group (2006) the question was asked of industry leaders:

“Which of the following channels do you expect will be critical pieces of the media mix in the years to come?”

Category	Responses %
Direct mail	81.3
Search engine marketing	70.1
Online advertising (non-search)	41.2
Mobile marketing	29.2

Table 2: Winterberry Group LLC. 2006

The role of technology

Technology has swept through the advertising industry faster than through fellow communication disciplines such as PR and even journalism, and arguably will have longer lasting effects as consumers race to embrace these continually evolving new technologies.

Advances in technology have changed the face of advertising communication, from that of a process driven by the manufacturer/marketer to one now controlled by the consumer. Markets of all shapes and sizes are fragmenting, or as Kitchen (2005) refers to it, *demassifying*. At the same time, media has proliferated to such an extent, and as the family unit has changed so radically, that traditional ideas about consumers and families are outdated. Quotes Kitchen (2005): “The UK consumer, we are assured, is more street savvy than ever before and can spot marketing stunt a mile off.” Issues of ethics in terms of privacy and confidentiality come to the fore, suggesting that the marketing communicator of tomorrow will need to be cogniscent of the role and influence of marketing communication messages more than ever before. For practitioners this means that we can no longer simply identify consumers by bland demographic or geographic classifications. We need to truly understand, not the mass market but the individuals we are communicating with. This understanding has in itself introduced new roles into the marketing communications profession and new requirements into the training processes of today’s and tomorrow’s communications practitioner.

Changing practices: the evolving influence of IMC

For over a decade we have witnessed an expanding body of literature as well as a growing practitioner focus on integrated marketing communication (IMC), defined as “Communication via a mix of promotional techniques ranging from PR and advertising to direct marketing so as to create awareness and propensity to purchase.” (Kitchen, 2005). Some years ago the two communication disciplines of advertising and public relations began to merge under the heading: integrated marketing communications. In America, many schools and universities have adapted the IMC concept and have sent their graduates into the field to mostly an enthusiastic response. The concept of IMC is generally attributed to Northwestern University professor of marketing, Don Schultz. Professor Schultz, himself a guest lecturer at CSU in 2005, suggests that today communication is marketing and marketing is communication, and that the integration of individual disciplines such as advertising and public relations should be an evolving and logical occurrence. Geimann (2001) identifies three trends for the evolving communications marketplace:

- (i) The continuing and accelerated growth of the Internet and other online mediums as key sources of information;
- (ii) The rapid pace of change in communications technology and the tools used to employ this technology (Internet, mobile phones, pod-casting) will make it difficult to settle on one single and enduring application;
- (iii) Consumers see what we refer to as individual communication disciplines, as simply sources of information – be this news via journalism, branded messages via advertising, or communication relating to an company or organization via public relations.

According to Robert Giles, director of the Neiman Foundation at Harvard University, “Students must be firmly grounded in the professional disciplines of gathering and verifying information, thinking critically about the facts at hand and preparing a reliable, accurate and fair account.” (2001).

At universities, the integrated marketing communications concept has won considerable support, and not surprisingly in the US where discipline founder Don Schultz is a vocal and

high profile advocate of IMC. Curriculums focus on the coordination of all ‘organisational communications’ directed at building positive relationships with potential customers, stakeholders and employees. In Australia, many tertiary institutions have moved to include bachelor programs in marketing communications and mass communications in their course offerings.

Within the School of Communication at CSU we have elected to stay with single discipline degrees but are now actively blending multi-elective experiences in our single degree programs to give students a broader understanding of the total or integrated communications marketplace. Advertising and Public Relations (as does Journalism, Theatre Media and Commercial Radio) remain individual disciplines with individual bachelor awards. However in Advertising and PR particularly, CSU undergraduate students may undertake up to nine discipline-specific subjects as electives to support their majors, including subjects from business and management. The trend to the integration of disciplines is an aspect of a changing communications scenario that needs to be considered in terms of any course review, as does its impact on graduates’ ability to work in the industry.

Geimann (2001) recognizes that the new millennium has brought with it significant change in terms of trends and challenges, principally through the escalating pace of technology. Market demand is driving new product and service development, which in turn is influencing teaching and learning strategies in the area of marketing communications and advertising. This in turn is issuing in the demand for a new generation of well educated and well grounded professionals.

Industry dynamics

A research study undertaken by the Winterberry Group (2006) into the state of the advertising agency finds that the traditional marketing model is changing, and with it the traditional advertising agency. Indeed, in recent years we have seen the decline and virtual disappearance of the “full service” advertising agency – the one-stop, strategic, client service, creative and media shop – into two distinct new entities: the ‘creative agency’ and the ‘media agency’. Agencies are experiencing the most significant change in their over 100 year history.

I have no idea what the future will be, but I can guarantee you that three key ingredients will be needed: change, change and change.

Maurice Levy, Chairman and CEO, Publicis Group

Marketers are shifting away from advertising which favours media, to direct marketing and promotion, which does not. While this has been happening for decades, the digital revolution has helped accelerate the shift. This means less advertising in the future and less money for media – all media. That’s a reality.

Dave Morgan, CEO, Tadoda

Technology has been the major driver of marketing communication, and thus agency change, ushering in a proliferation of communication channels that has diminished the

impact of traditional broadcast / television and print. Consumers now expect and get information at their fingertips. Amongst all this change, the role of the advertising agency is being challenged and is changing. As Winterberry (2006) identifies, the agency, once considered the core to marketing effort and trusted counselor to their clients, now has seen its portfolio of responsibilities altered by the emergence of non-traditional communication channels and by the emergence of specialist practitioners: media-specific agencies, interactive/online specialists, management consultants, strategic and media planning companies as well as a proliferation of 'freelance' creative consultants. Whilst this shift in agency dominance is yet to be fully realized, one thing is for sure – agencies must adjust to meet the new requirements of their clients. According to Anthony J. Hopp, Chairman of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), "The agencies that succeed are the ones that can find new ways to engage and connect with consumers. If you are not doing that, you are not going to be in business." (2006).

The role of the practitioner

A comprehensive study by the Winterberry Group (2006) identifies that the balance of power in the agency/client relationship is swinging, suggesting that some marketers have begun looking at agency services as commodities – to be bought solely on price. Comments from agencies such as: "...clients better understand the details of our business. We are more of a commodity to them; they don't see the value as much as they used to..." are now commonplace. The reality is that client companies do better understand the business and now have access to the same technology and information that their agencies have. The differential often times, comes down to people. David Ogilvy, doyen of the advertising industry, once famously claimed that the assets of his advertising agency go down in the lift each evening. People and their skills are often the basis of a successful agency/client relationship, and a key differential between one agency and another. Therefore, it may well be argued that advertising students now need to develop not only practical hands-on vocational skills, but also broader thinking and analytical skills as well as well developed inter-personal relationship skills.

A study by Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) into the creation of future advertising leaders offers insights into the needs and attributes of practitioners and the implications for developing and nurturing them. Key attributes are nominated as being the ability to be insightful, inclusive of others, interactive in outlook and inventive in thinking. This is very much synchronous with the developments in, and the changing role of the industry identified by Geimann (2001) and reiterated in the Winterberry Group study (2006).

Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) identify three key attributes of the contemporary practitioner. Firstly, they need to be generalists rather than specialists, able to investigate the macro picture and offer an ability to solve problems. Secondly, practitioners (and their agencies) need to be inclusive, with the focus being on the client's business, rather than seeking sole ownership of that 'big idea'. The final attribute is that of being 'interactive', with practitioners understanding the consumer's engagement with emerging technologies and their relevance in building brand relationships.

The penetration and influence of the Internet, mobile phones and digital communication, as well as the consumer's growing preference for interactive media is challenging the very nature of advertising and hence the qualifications of the people who work in the industry. This would seem to indicate that advertising programs must focus on developing in students the attributes identified by Spence-Stone and Byrne (2004) and others, creating an ability to think, analyse, argue, reflect and challenge, not simply to create ads.

Impact on employment

In a discussion paper prepared on the creation of advertising leaders of the future, Spence-Stone and Byrne (2004) note that finding and keeping 'good talent' is an industry-wide problem. Their research confirms anecdotal evidence that: "...while advertising practitioners want to be the 'brand architect' or 'top dog' that is trusted, relied upon and advocated by their clients, in truth relationships with advertisers have become more tactical, harder to access and commoditized." The bottom-line in terms of these findings is that the industry needs "a new kind of person – someone who can think about the client's business at a high level and someone who knows every aspect of brand building. In stating this Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) would seem to be suggesting that advertising practitioners need to be thinkers, not just doers.

A front page story in the leading advertising industry publication Ad News (2006, 16 June, p.1) highlights the situation in the industry and the demand for well trained people. It also highlights the fact that in today's environment of tight margins and a subsequent lack of commitment to training, the industry is struggling to find good talent. According to Darren Woolley, founder of personnel consultancy P3, "While there was informal training in the past, in particular a lot more mentoring, the focus now across all industries – not just advertising- is on the bottom line and on cutting costs." Chairman of the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA), Russell Howcroft adds: "As agencies have been squeezed, things fall away that cost money, and one of those is training."

Finding qualified staff is an even bigger issue for media agencies as they broaden their service offerings and expertise beyond that of the traditional media company to encompass strategy, client service and even creative services. Media agencies are looking outside the industry to university professors and research specialists to staff their growing units. Mindshare CEO Chris Walton states "There is a lack of courses addressing the issues we want to address, and the courses available are too expensive." Here he is referring to 'after-market' courses for working professional, in the main provided by the AFA. He seems to be indicating that in his view there are no suitable courses or training being provided at university level (Ad News, 2006 pg.1).

3. Influences on Education

According to Lisa Michael, national recruitment director at Deloitte, academic achievement is important, indeed practically a prerequisite, but it's not everything. Employers are looking for skills which are not solely measured by an academic transcript. "University arms students with the academic theory of their discipline, but most importantly it is

teaching them how to learn (2005). Maria Tarrant from the Business Council of Australia (BCA) adds that employers want graduates who not only demonstrate technical skills and knowledge but also have ‘employability’ skills. According to BCA research, business wants employees who can solve problems, and show initiative, organization and self-management. Generic and personal skills are growing in importance as the life span of technical knowledge has shrunk. “Technology keeps changing, so you need a graduate who is also an ongoing learner.” (Tarrant, 2005).

Supporting the view expressed by the employer community, the literature suggests that teaching and learning strategies need to change to keep pace with the evolving business and specifically, communications industry. Newmann (1992) proposes an integrated concept of authentic intellectual achievement based on three criteria: the development of student knowledge through disciplined enquiry beyond the classroom; disciplined enquiry that replicates the skills and techniques of professionals; and reflection and simulation of problems, issues and situations encountered in the real world. Brown *et al* (1989) introduce the concept of cognitive apprenticeship, the development of concepts through continuing authentic activity. Cognitive apprenticeship supports learning in a domain (environment) by enabling students to acquire, develop and use cognitive tools in an authentic domain activity – a real-world situation. Executive Director of the Australian Association of Graduate Employers, Ben Reeves cites industry experience undertaken by students during their final year of university as being worth more than top-ranking academic results (2005). Joanne Tyler from the National Association of Careers Advisors concurs, noting that today most undergraduate courses include a mandatory internship period within the course structure (2005). This would seem to support Newmann’s belief in the value of real-world situations and processes.

Possible impacts for teaching and learning

In an article in *Campus Review* (April 2007, p. 21), the question was asked: “What is a university education?” According to the author of the article Professor Steven Schwartz, Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie University, this is the single most important question facing universities and one that is not easily answered.

The literature confirms that, in the majority of cases, universities when referring to learning talk mainly about ‘skills’ acquisition. According to Novak (2007), a university education should not just teach skills, it should nurture the soul. “Educated people should have some idea about what they consider important in life and what is not; what is worth living (or dying) for, and what is simply flotsam and jetsam. Ideally, in every university education, there should be one moment in which every student thinks. Yes, that is what it’s all about. Whilst diversity offers students choice, not to choose, to consider everything is equally as important.” (Novak, 2007).

Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) identify that a university (advertising) program needs to be both responsive to industry needs and pedagogically sound. Research undertaken in 2004 identified that agencies agree that finding and keeping good talent is an industry-wide problem. Their research offers a clearer picture of the needs and attributes of practitioners and the implications for developing and nurturing them. Research findings suggest that

“...new practitioners need to be generalists rather than specialists, able to offer insights to advertisers because of their curiosity in investigating the macro picture and their desire and skills to solve problems.” (2004). Kerr & Proud (2005) identify that for employees the top three priorities are the same generic skills – communication skills (88.3%), personality traits (81.4%) and strategic or analytical thinking (79%), with a university degree coming in at number 7 priority (51.1%). Generic skills rated most highly by employers when choosing entry level staff. Practical (real world) experience was also considered a valuable asset, supporting the internship and ‘prac’ programs explicit in the current Charles Sturt University Advertising course, and enhancing the beliefs of Brown *et al* (1989) that masters make explicit their tactical knowledge and then empower students to continue independently within ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998), thereby advancing the concept of reflective thinking and continuous self-learning.

As study by Waller (2006) looked at graduate attributes from the student’s perspective. The quantitative study conducted amongst almost 300 second and final year undergraduate advertising students indicated that they believe that:

- The top 5 skills required were: Oral communication, teamwork, relationship building, decision-making and problem solving.
- The top 5 attributes were: reliability, being hardworking, honesty and integrity, showing initiative and strategic thinking.

These skills would seem to mirror those expressed as desired by employers and support the hands-on, professional skills imbedded in a number of advertising degree courses, including that of Charles Sturt University.

The Australian studies of Spence-Stone & Bryne (2004), of Kerr & Proud (2005) and of Waller (2006) are contemporary and enlightening and highlight another crucial aspect of the current state of the industry, that of the sometimes tenuous relationship between agency and client. “Practitioners and their agencies need to be inclusive, with the priority firmly on the client’s business.” (Spence-Stone & Bryne, 2004). The literature identifies the growing divide between agency and client, yet interestingly in reviewing this research, reference is made to consultation with the advertising and media agencies, but nowhere is their mention of consultation with the other major stakeholder, the client company.

Considering the state of change in the marketing communications industry and the relationship between client and agency, my belief as a practitioner and as an academic, and one informed by feedback from client companies as well as from dissertations by leading global marketing organizations such as Procter & Gamble (IAA World Congress, 2006), is that graduate teaching and learning strategies must be predicated on not only the stated requirements of the traditional stakeholders (the creative advertising and media agencies), but also on those requirements of the client companies that employ these agencies. Input from this key stakeholder group is critical to inform both course content and teaching and learning practice.

4. Course Review: Research Methodology

Introduction

Methodologies for course reviews for the BA (Communication-Advertising) prior to 2007 have primarily employed content analysis and limited interrogation of practitioners via telephone surveys. In the main, these studies have focused on theoretical content and the perspective of advertising agency personnel as practitioners and employers.

In contrast to previous studies, this 2007 research study seeks to identify not simply content, but the graduate attributes, knowledge and skills that are seen as essential in the practitioner environment, and specifically those sought by **all** stakeholders, thereby supporting the premise of Berryman (1997) that the point of education is to prepare students for effective functioning in non-school settings. Stakeholders in this study are identified as:

- Agencies – both creative and media - as direct employers;
- The peak industry bodies - as representatives and as providers of educational programs in their own rite;
- The business / client community - as employers of the agencies; and
- The students themselves.

A key differential between this study and studies undertaken previously is the recognition of the significant changes that have taken place in the last five years in the industry, in terms of the actual structure of the industry and professional relationships between stakeholders in the industry. Specifically:

(i) The emergence of the ‘media agency’ and the ‘creative agency’.

There are now two distinct entities, derived from what was previously the singular ‘full service’ advertising agency. This has created a diversity of employment opportunities for advertising graduates, as each entity is seen to require unique expertise and skills. This is particularly true in the case of the media agency which it appears is struggling to find the right type of people.

(ii) The changing relationships between agency and client.

Specifically the client’s focus of working with an agency ‘that can think about a client’s business at a high level...’ (Spence-Stone & Byrne, 2004). As we have seen from the literature, clients are seeking new and specialised skills from their agency partners and specifically, their partners’ people, in line with new communication paradigms in the business and consumer environment

As the literature identifies, there appears a growing divide between agency and client organizations. Hence, a key differential in this study is the inclusion of client companies in the investigation; for it is felt that it is no longer sufficient simply to identify solely the advertising agency needs. It is essential now to understand what client companies seek from their agencies and critically, from the people who work for these agencies. It is considered then that this research study is particularly important in that it will both inform the Charles Sturt University Advertising course review and add to the body of knowledge within the

agency and client sector in Australia, with a view to informing the evolution of educational practice within the broader marketing communications industry.

The methodology for this study is presented in two parts:

1. The Theoretical Orientation.
2. The Research Design.

1. Theoretical orientation

The research utilises *grounded theory* (Somekh & Lewin, 2005), that is theory developed that is based on actual data gathered through qualitative research, making it more reflective of the practical situations being investigated than speculative derived theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1998). The reflective nature of the grounded theory model was also particularly relevant considering my professional background in advertising and current involvement as both a practitioner and as an academic. Additionally, the process allowed me as the principal researcher to operate as an interpreter of the data, not just as a reporter or describer of the situation (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

In line with the process of grounded theory, concepts may be derived from multiple sources of qualitative data, including narrative interviews, observations, documents, biographies, videos, photographs and any combination of these (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Gathering data on the same topic is an accepted way of validating research findings and the utilization of multiple sources of data underscores the importance of alternating data collection. Traditionally, data collection is based on observed events however, as Daymon & Holloway (2002) note, in contemporary research it is common practice to include interviews, even though they are based on participant's accounts of events and points of view rather than one's own observations and experiences. Use of the interview method is justified on the basis that grounded theory is concerned to capture tacit knowledge gained from relevant interviews (Partington, 2000). In the case of this research project, data was gathered from numerous sources, including interviews.

Although the grounded theory approach is recognized as particularly appropriate for research in marketing communications, there were difficulties in operationalising a full grounded theory approach. Additionally, it was felt that theoretical sampling may not be necessary as the population for the study was easily identified and the sample could be selected in advance of data collection. Therefore it may be said that in this instance I have employed a grounded theory-style and, as supported by Daymon & Holloway (2002), I suggest that the research holds valid.

Within the context of the Advertising course review program, and in line with a grounded theory-style approach, the process which I followed in capturing, analysing and interpreting data incorporated the following stages:

Sampling

Selection of the appropriate sample of individuals from the population to provide information on the topics under investigation was made prior to data collection. Sampling continued until it was believed that no new information was being obtained.

Coding and analysis of the data

The process of data analysis was a continual one throughout the entire program, from the beginning of the market investigation, and then throughout the literature review and interviews. Themes were identified and named, encoding the data into categories. The process commenced by *open coding*, breaking down and conceptualizing the data. Similar concepts and ideas were identified by labeling the data line by line in interview transcripts and cross-referencing to data identified in the literature. The logical next step was to gather data together and reassemble under common headings and categories using the process of *axial coding*. By reviewing and re-sorting common themes, major groupings or categories were formed. As Daymon & Holloway (2002) identify, invariably a picture began to emerge that served to support my working hypothesis.

The final step was the development of *core categories*, categories that integrated themselves to provide an overall picture or storyline. This process, also referred to as *selective coding*, clearly identified the concepts that were most significant to inform my final recommendations.

Sources of data

Daymon & Holloway (2002) suggest that data that is used to generate grounded theory may be both primary and secondary. Secondary data may include transcripts of existing documentation, relevant reports and of course, the literature. Whilst the initial literature review was undertaken to consider the body of knowledge on the topic and to identify any gaps in the knowledge (and provide a reason to undertake the research study), the process employed of ‘cross-referencing’ the literature helped to confirm or refute categories discovered in my primary research. Sources of data included:

- Review of the literature;
- Review of secondary research on the tertiary education sector;
- Review of specific research on student attitudes towards selection of university and courses undertaken by student groups within the context of a formal research program;
- Review of student ‘exit’ surveys undertaken by the University;
- Formal discussions with academic colleagues within the School of Communication and from other ‘service teaching’ schools;
- Formal discussions with Course Coordinators within the School of Communication under the auspices of the School of Communication Teaching and Learning Committee;
- Formal discussions within the Advertising and Commercial Radio Discipline Group within the School of Communication;
- Formal and on-going discussions with industry representatives, employers and trainers;
- Additional information from the industry collected during the course review;
- Depth interviews with a specifically convened Industry Advisory Panel.

Ethical considerations

In line with the requirements of a researcher at Charles Sturt University, approval for the research was sought and received from the Ethics in Human Research Committee. Depth

interviews conducted with industry professionals were undertaken under the auspices of the CSU Ethics in Human Research Committee. Steps taken to establish the trustworthiness of the research included:

- An initial invitation in writing to identified professionals within the industry to participate in the review;
- Upon acceptance from the interviewees, a formal Information Statement was forwarded to them which clearly outlined the purpose of my research and advised them of the nature and duration of the interview. Additionally, it informed interviewees of my intention to audio-record the interviews for transcription, confirmed all aspects of confidentiality and sought their formal agreement to participate via a signed Consent Form returned to me;
- Location of the interviews was in a place suitable to all the participants;
- An example of question types was provided prior to the interview. The style of questioning was open, and active listening was maximized throughout the interviews to validate my understanding of the participants' responses and to springboard further questioning (Dayman & Holloway, 2002).

2. Research design

Prior to engaging in data collection, I conducted an initial literature review to narrow my field of investigation and to aid in the selection of a research methodology and eventual preparation of questions. I also conducted a thorough review of any existing (secondary) research that could inform my investigation, including formal research, conference and discussion papers and meeting notes from course review discussions within my own School. As the course review process spanned a period over around 12 months, I committed to ongoing reviews of the literature as well formal and informal exchanges of information with colleagues also involved in course reviews.

Sampling procedure

Somekh & Lewin (2005) suggest that research design should take into account a number of important considerations, including access to people, the range of perspectives sought, ethics of data collection, and the analysis procedure. An additionally key consideration is whether we are seeking insights and opinions (qualitative) or statistical substantiation (quantitative). The first decision was one of research methodology. The decision to utilise a qualitative depth-interview methodology was based on two factors. Firstly, recognition that less than 20% of the agencies in Australia represented well over 80% of the advertising activity in this country (Ad News, 2006), and that if I could talk to the influencers from this 20% I would gain a representative perspective of the Australian industry. Secondly, I was seeking insights and opinion, not numerical substantiation.

Recruitment

The project's data was collected between September 2006 and November 2006. Representative sampling was used to recruit participants. Through my own industry contacts I also approached practitioners known to me. The advantage of this approach is that it enabled me to use my existing advertising and academic communication networks to quickly gain access to the participant group. In effect a panel of industry experts.

Sample composition

An Industry Advisory Panel was constituted for the purpose of the course review, comprising top-level advertising agency management and senior personnel as well as management from peak industry bodies representing the advertising agency sector, the media agency sector, the marketing communications industry and critically, the client sector. The composition of the panel reflected the diversity of the industry and areas for employment for CSU Advertising graduates. All interviewees held positions where they were either directly or indirectly involved in personnel employment. Face-to-face depth interviews were conducted with a total of 15 industry representatives.

Position	Agency	Media	Industry Body	Practitioner
Number of Interviewees	4	5	4	2
Specific role/responsibility	MDs of major Sydney-based advertising/creative agencies	MDs or HR Managers of Sydney-based media agencies	President of international advertising industry body CEO of national advertising industry body CEO of national media industry body CEO of national client representative body	Senior Strategic Planner Strategic Planner (ex CSU graduate)

Table 3: In-depth interviews - sample composition

Data collection

From the 15 letters sent to advertising agency, media agency and peak industry body people, there was unanimous endorsement of the project and agreement to participate, indicating the interest in the project by the various stakeholder groups.

Beyond specific feedback from the interviews, there was an overall commitment to provide services and resources to ensure the on-going success of the course.

“We are delighted to see how passionate CSU is in maintaining a high quality program, and we hope to support you as much as we can in the future to ensure its continued success.”

Verbatim: 5.13

A question guide was developed to ensure that areas were consistently covered across all participants. Questions were initially piloted with one participant and then refined for use with future participants. Questions acted as a loose yet logical framework for eliciting response and prompted emerging concepts. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, allowing time to develop an opening rapport and pursue avenues of questioning during the interview. In a number of instances more than one participant was present in the interview (example: interview with the media HR personnel) so care was taken to avoid ‘talking over’ one another. Interviews were audio taped with participants’ consent and transcribed verbatim. Assurance was given that no interviewees would be identified.

5. Data Analysis

Introduction

Audio taped interviews were transcribed and identified by participant code and date to protect anonymity.

Using a grounded theory-style approach (Daymon & Holloway, 2002), I used coding to reduce the verbatim interview data into major categories. Categories were identified, as were major themes in the literature.

Initially a process of open coding was used to break down the data into basic concepts. This facilitated the identification of important issues and prompted the emergence of themes. Open coding was done as line notes then collected and compiled under themes as they emerged. Axial coding facilitated compilation under common themes and headings. At the end of the process 10 specific categories emerged, many obviously inter-related:

- (i) The CSU course
- (ii) Consumer control
- (iii) Staff employment
- (iv) Consumer treatment
- (v) Traditional advertising
- (vi) Whole business landscape
- (vii) Today’s advertising
- (viii) Agency structure and methods
- (ix) Agency remuneration
- (x) Agency / client relationships

Six (6) key categories emerged from the literature:

- (i) Employment
- (ii) Emerging trends
- (iii) IMC
- (iv) Agency changes
- (v) The role of the practitioner
- (vi) Education

The two sources of data were then correlated as follows:

From the Literature	From the Research
Employment	Staff employment Whole business landscape
Emerging trends	Today's advertising
IMC	Traditional advertising
Agency changes	Agency structure and methods Agency remuneration Agency / client relationships
The role of the practitioner	Consumer treatment Consumer control
Education	The CSU course

Table 4: Correlation of categories from the data

Emerging Themes

From the data and categories, three central themes covering a range of categories emerged from the data:

1. Industry trends
2. Graduate requirements
3. Course requirements

The themes and their supporting categories are outlined in the following Table 5:

Themes	Main Categories
A. Industry trends	Traditional advertising Today's advertising Emerging trends IMC Agency changes (Structure and methods,

	remuneration, agency / client relationships) Whole business landscape
B. Graduate requirements	The role of the practitioner Consumer control Consumer treatment
C. Course requirements	Employment Staff employment Education The CSU course

Table 5: Emerging themes and their categories

6. Key Findings

The following are the key findings from the themes developed from practitioner interviews, and supported by the literature.

A. Industry Trends

The traditional marketing model is changing and along with it the traditional advertising agency, the major source of employment for Advertising course graduates. Recent years has seen the virtual disappearance of the ‘full service’ advertising agency, and the emergence of the more specialist ‘creative’ and ‘media’ agencies (Winterberry Group, 2006).

A lot of the power of the budget which used to reside with the agencies has moved across to the media buying guys. The media buying guys are now not just people putting ‘crosses in boxes’. They’re hiring their own strategic planners. So, if an agency doesn’t get on board with that and doesn’t work with that they are just clinging on to the past.

Verbatim: R1 – 28.1

Technology is seen to be a major driver as consumers now have access to information, including marketing messages 24/7 – at their fingertips when and where they wish to receive them (Winterberry Group, 2006). This has changed the balance of ‘power’ from that of the marketer to that of the consumer.

I think that is important that we look at the whole business landscape. Look at the way consumers have so much more control. I think that there are so many different elements that point to the whole of this industry being exposed to massive change.

Verbatim: R1 – 29.2

The flow-on effect is that agencies are now more accountable than ever for the performance of their campaigns (Spence-Stone & Byrne, 2004). This in turn indicates that the requirements of people working in the industry have changed, from largely practical/hands-on skills to ‘soft’ skills and consumer understanding.

It’s not about what you say it’s more about what they (consumers) do. How they behave. How they connect. It’s now much more about relationships.

Verbatim: R2 – 2.1

What they (clients) are asking for is real accountability in terms of the success of their advertising. And it’s no longer based on reach or frequency and ‘tarps’. It’s what we are asked to respond to by a lot of commercial clients – campaign optimisation.

Verbatim: R5 – 5.4

Everyone talks about PBR – performance based remuneration, but it’s very hard to get anyone to do it as we find when we’re talking to a new client. In the end it’s often put in the too-hard basket...most people I talk to say that they (PBR schemes) are really hard work and in the main they opt for simple remuneration schemes.

Verbatim: R1 – 32.1

The expansion of the IMC (Integrated Marketing Communications) model in recent years has seen a blurring of discipline definitions and the adoption of the concept of media or mass ‘communications’ by both industry and the academy (Kitchen, 2005).

We use the words ‘communication partners’ and that’s our position with our clients. That’s how they refer to us. You can’t really have a BA “Communication-Communication”, but less emphasis on the word ‘advertising’ and more emphasis on a word like ‘communication’ makes sense.

Verbatim: R1 – 34.1

Geimann (2001) identifies three trends for the evolving communications marketplace: the continuing accelerated growth of the Internet and online mediums as key sources of information; the rapid change in communications technology as the tools available make it difficult to settle on one enduring application; and the consumer’s lack of differentiation of individual mediums (advertising, PR, journalism etc.) as specific sources of information.

I think that technology is going to influence things enormously...changing media, changing technology and therefore changing consumer habits. The young consumers now behave in a completely different way to us.

Verbatim: R6/1 – 5.1

They are not big media consumers as such. They are big consumers of the Internet largely speaking, but their whole communication philosophy is very new and different. So technology is going to be the big influence on the way consumers behave. The way they consume information, the way they search for information...their critical skills will be much sharper than ours, the current generation of consumers.

Verbatim: R6/2 – 5.1.2

In light of what I have referred to as the ‘velocity of change’, a process of continuous course monitoring is essential. The findings of this research program support this. The marketing communications/advertising industry is undergoing what is without a doubt it’s most dynamic change ever. As technology develops, the need for technically-skilled professionals is spreading to all areas of communication. Whilst the demands and technical teaching costs in communications courses of these skills come at a price, they are omni-important. The need for essential technology/production skills has now extended to all communication disciplines (including Advertising) where students require digital media production skills for all mediums across all communication channels. This is seen as critical in the development of a well-rounded graduate. These industry developments demand essential technical resources and expertise.

I think gone are the days when you could employ anybody who doesn’t have a sound understanding of technology. Not just consuming it but how to use it and how to understand how other people are consuming it...I think that this requires an incredible broad mindedness and open mindedness.

Verbatim: R6/2 - 5.6

B. Graduate Requirements

David Ogilvy maintained that the assets of his company go down in the lift every evening. It is a people business, but the skills required by the people who populate the industry are both specialised and changing. Spence-Stone and Bryne (2004) identify that the key attributes that agency and client employers are looking for are the ability to be insightful, inclusive of other, interactive in outlook and inventive in thinking. Geimann (2001) and Waller (2006) concur. They add that they need to be generalists, rather than specialists, able to investigate the macro picture and offer an ability to solve problems. This would seem to indicate that advertising programs at universities must focus on developing these attributes amongst students, creating in graduates the ability to think, analyse, argue, reflect and challenge. Not simply ‘make ads’.

We’ll be looking for people with different skills. We don’t actually have to have people who can design and produce a website, because we have a company in the group who does that, but we do need people who can understand what can be done so that they can talk with our clients about it.

What we are finding is that there is a groundswell of interest in these in the business (technology). Everybody is teaching themselves as fast as they can go.

Verbatim: R1 – 24.1

When you start to talk about the sort of people that we’ll be looking for, they’ll be people who are open minded, imaginative, innovative...able to see changes. I think that it is absolutely essential that they have a really good grasp of technology.

Verbatim: R6/1 – 4.6

An industry perspective is added by Reeves (2005) and Tarrant (2005) who suggest that employers want graduates who not only demonstrate technical skills, but also have employability skills – initiative, organization and self-management and a commitment to

ongoing learning. Kerr & Proud (2005) add to this, identifying that the three priorities for employers are communication skills, personality traits and strategic, analytical thinking.

What we look for in an agency is that they really fundamentally understand how we want to position ourselves in the market. We don't want a me-too story.

Verbatim: R7/1: 12.7

I think what students in the next few years have to be mindful of is having a very good grasp of the (communication) channels and in particular digital media but there is more of an onus on young students these days to be more knowledgeable and to know more because there are more channels opening up. If I was a client, and I'm looking at an agency account manager, I would really want to know that they know their strategic background and that yes they can tell me about all the channels of communication available in this modern age and will give me a thorough rationale as to why.

Verbatim: R7/2 – 5.7

What are the essential skills I look for now in my employees? Brains, entrepreneurial skills. We've got a hiring policy here - very bright people who are going to be fun to work with. They need to be able to express themselves. I'd say, inquisitive.

Verbatim: R1 – 33.1

C. Course Requirements

Arguably the biggest change and challenge affecting the advertising industry is the proliferation and convergence of media channels. This is being largely driven by technology and fed by today's consumers' apparently insatiable appetite for information, on their own terms, when and where they want it.

The most important change in marketing communications over the next five years? Definitely the impact of digital. We are a very consumer-generated media country...It's huge and it's only going to get bigger and it's how advertising will take advantage of that. That is going to be the real test.

Verbatim: R8: 3.8

Supporting this, the following points emerged from specific discussions with the Media Federation of Australia (MFA):

- The high regard with which the CSU Advertising course and graduates are held within the media and broader advertising community;
- Endorsement of the need to increase the advertising media component of the course from one subject to at least two, to allow for the offering of expanded content;
- Agreement that the media landscape is changing at a dynamic rate and subject content needs to reflect this, particularly in areas of electronic and new media;
- Endorsement of Kajulu Communications as a proven successful teaching and learning environment, not only for general advertising skills but in particular, specific media training;

- Agreement that in order to teach today's more sophisticated and technology-driven media, professional resources and specialised tuition must be provided by the MFA to support subject learning materials;
- Identification that media is still seen by students (and indeed professionals) as an 'Xs in boxes' job. There is a need to include in content and teaching a broader perspective of the skills that can be applied and the challenges that the profession offers - in areas such as client service, strategic planning, consumer insight, media negotiation, planning and purchasing.
- An overarching commitment to provide services and resources to ensure the ongoing success of the course. "We are delighted to see how passionate CSU is in maintaining a high quality program, and we hope to support you as much as we can in the future to ensure its continued success.

Firstly, the MFA (Media Federation of Australia) fully endorses your efforts to review the course for 2008 and we would like to confirm our interest in working closely with you to identify appropriate subjects and content, and of course to offer any industry expertise to help shape the program overall from development stage through to any lecturing opportunities.

Verbatim: R8: Email communication

7. Implementation of findings

The current course has been and remains well accepted by the marketing communications industry, with a strong reputation for preparing graduates who are industry-ready. The basic structure of the Advertising course remains as per the current structure, with changes as detailed in the 2007/8 Course Review Report. The Industry Advisory Panel has endorsed many of the key components of the current course, noting the following:

(i) The industry is seeking graduates that have analytical skills and are reflective thinkers. Exposure to a breadth of knowledge fosters better thinkers.

Whilst initial thinking was to replace existing social science subjects such as Politics and Literature with more industry-focused hands-on subjects, feedback from the industry, as well as from academics within CSU indicates that the inclusion of these subjects encourages development of the knowledge and analytical skills necessary to complement the more practical skills taught. These subjects will now be offered as electives and offer greater flexibility of enrolment.

(ii) Feedback from students at the end of year one and observations by our own Advertising academics suggests that students struggle to see the relevance of some first year subjects, and are keen to become involved in the process of learning about Advertising from the beginning of their course. Currently there are no Advertising discipline subjects in the first year. This observation was made also by the Industry Advisory Panel.

An Advertising 'principles' subject will be incorporated into year one of the degree course to introduce students to the discipline in their first year.

(iii) Whilst the course incorporates many practical subjects, one area that is not currently addressed is that of design, not only as it applies to the obvious areas of advertisement layout, but in critical areas such as presentation and report design. This will also broaden students' skill base.

A Design 'fundamentals' subject will be included in the first year, effectively providing a creative subject in all three years. However, consideration should be given to the offering of a broader range of communication production subjects.

(iv) Technology is driving communications. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on providing students with both technological/production understanding and skills.

The existing two media production subjects will be combined to provide a consistent focus over a full year, providing basic skills for implementation in years two and three.

Additionally, consideration should be given to the introduction of a comprehensive course in digital media production to integrate content providers such as Advertising, Commercial Radio, Public Relations and Organisational Communication, Journalism (Print and Broadcast), and to an extent Theatre Media, with producers within the School of Communication. The course should include areas of digital design, digital visual and sound production. This is seen as an essential element of their education and industry preparation that is currently not available to Advertising (Communication) students.

(v) With the growing influence of the consumer in marketing communications, more emphasis could be placed on subjects and content that fosters greater consumer understanding.

Currently, one final year subject directly addresses the development of consumer insight and subsequent communication strategies. A structured schedule of practitioner lectures from major agencies that employ the account/strategic planning discipline will be implemented. As well, involvement with the Australian Account Planning Group (APG), the professional body representing strategy planning (and represented on the Industry Advisory Panel) will be incorporated into subject delivery.

(vi) The explosion of media and communication channels is not being adequately addressed by the current single (8 credit point) subject. In line with this explosion of activity and the segregation of 'creative' and 'media' agencies, there is a need to prepare graduates for what is in reality, a whole new world and media environment. The Media Federation of Australia has indicated significant support in terms of input into subject content and professional training materials and facilities.

When one considers that between 70% and 80% of marketing communications above-the-line expenditure is directed to communication/media channels, the importance of consumer understanding in channel planning is paramount. The recommendation is to expand media content in the course by creating two new subjects addressing channel planning and planning and purchasing. These subjects will be delivered in sessions 3 and 4 in the second

year of the degree and will inform communication strategy and campaign planning studies in the final year.

Specifically, the recommendation by the Industry Advisory Panel is for students to identify their media interests by Session 5 and then to develop their media expertise in the workshop environment of Kajulu Communications, the on-campus student advertising agency of CSU. By working within the course curriculum, and in supporting student teams in the development of communication campaigns, this is seen as an ideal way to prepare students for a career in a media agency.

(vii) The compulsory internship of four (4) weeks is seen as being valuable to both the student and the industry.

The new course should therefore retain the four (4) week Industry Internship. Further it is considered that an industry internship compliments the professional activities students undertake in the current final semester Advertising Workshop subject. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that in many instances students completing their internship with a company are often offered full time employment by that host company at the conclusion of their course. The recommendation therefore is that the current stand-alone internship subject be incorporated into an expanded final semester, final year 24 credit point 'professional practice' subject.

8. Conclusion and Discussion

Agency structures, communication channels and consumer attitudes and behaviours are creating an environment and demand for a new type of industry practitioner, one that has the practical skills, the technical skills, and the 'people' skills. Advertising staff within the School of Communication are regularly in contact with advertising industry employers (including members of the Industry Advisory Panel that was formed specifically for this review), and constantly monitor the recruitment needs and trends, on both a national and international basis.

The course review process is mandatory and one is undertaken every five (5) years. However, change is happening at lightning speed. Constant review of subject content is required and the continued close working relationship the Advertising course has with marketing communications industry is the best way to facilitate this.

The 2008 Bachelor of Arts (Communication-Advertising) Course Review Document details exactly how input from the industry and from colleagues has helped formulate the course structure for the 2008 – 2011 period. This course has now been accepted by the Faculty of Arts at Charles Sturt University for implementation from February 2008.

It is appropriate to formally thank all participants in this review, specifically my colleagues at CSU and on the Course Review Industry Advisory Panel for their input and assistance. I

believe that we have created real allies and developed even stronger relationships with the industry we partner throughout the process by simply asking for their professional input.

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Preparing students for professional practice: benchmark strategies for international student teaching and learning.

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Abstract

Teaching and learning strategies are changing in Australia as the global view of education is preparing students for participation in professional practice. Within the School of Communication at Charles Sturt University in Australia the distance between the classroom and the global professional community is closing. Kajulu Communications, the on-campus student advertising agency is recognised as an international benchmark for communication teaching and learning. Articulation agreements with our international partners see students working in Kajulu, applying best industry practice to a range of professional situations. By developing trans-national degree programs that offer opportunities for international students to complete their studies with Charles Sturt University, we are providing them with an internationally recognised degree and, within Kajulu, comprehensively preparing them for the rigors of the global communications industry that they are about to enter.

1. Introduction

In recent years, and in my role as Sub Dean International for the Faculty of Arts at Charles Sturt University, I have had the opportunity to travel extensively to countries as diverse as the United Arab Emirates and China. I have spent a considerable amount of time in Asia and South East Asia; specifically in China, Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. My focus has been on professional development, in particular global education trends, as well as the identification of opportunities to establish partnerships and articulation agreements with tertiary education providers to market Charles Sturt University communications courses. I am constantly impressed by the incredible growth of the consumer markets in these regions, and thus the growth of marketing communication, and the requirement for marketing communication expertise at both teaching and learning, and practitioner levels. At events such as Ad Asia, an international advertising conference in Singapore in November 2005, I came to truly appreciate the enormity of the Asia Pacific regional market and the confirmation that this was fast becoming the most powerful and influential marketing communication/advertising arena in the world. A region where growth in advertising and associated expenditure far surpasses that of the established markets of the United States and Europe, and certainly that of my own country, Australia. This is a region encompassing countries with both mature and developing communications marketplaces, countries diverse in both their social and commercial cultures. Countries that by the end of this decade will account for over 50% of the global marketing communication spend (Ad Asia, 2005). This is a region where many universities, including my own, are actively involved in the professional education sector. In the case of my University, we

have established relationships with major regional tertiary education providers as well as fostered professional involvement with the peak professional bodies such as the International Advertising Association and its regional chapters.

Education is one of the fastest growing industries in the Asia Pacific region (IAA, 2006). Countries such as China, Korea and, on the sub-continent, India have become a synonym for future business growth. Little wonder then that companies and education institutions from all corners of the world seek to build a presence here.

According to Mona Chung, Principal of Marketing China Pty Ltd, a company established to research China and consult to Australian companies entering the Chinese market, one distinct difference between the Chinese education system and that of Australia is the processing of data, the analysis of data and the decision-making process. Chung (2004) believes that whilst there is little doubt that China is hungry for established (and evolving) western expertise, decision-making will be cautious and considered. My own strategy for success in this region (China and SE Asia) is ensuring that our involvement and commitment is based on a sound understanding of the markets we enter, and is planned for the long term. Garry Titterton, the Asia-Pacific CEO of D'Arcy Masius Benton and Bowles Advertising endorses this approach when he says "The challenges facing multinationals are rigorous. China and the SE Asia region is more complex than Europe and there is a huge ignorance of the complexity of these countries. China, for example is a place where you have to be very patient and you have to build over time." Titterton argues that you can't go in and invest short-term, then pull out and try to get back in again. "It is about being consistent, steady and building confidence, and then the rewards will come." (Titterton, 2004).

Putting it into perspective

Consideration of the sheer scale of the Chinese market puts Titterton's comments into perspective. According to a recent survey undertaken by Dr Rui Yang of the Monash Centre for Research in International Education, the total number of higher education institutions in China in 2005 was 2273 (37 more than in 2004), including 1792 regular higher education institutions, which was 61 more than in 2004. Amongst the regular ones 701 institutions offered 4-year undergraduate education and above. 1091 institutions offered two to three-year programs, and 481 institutions offered adult higher education. The scale of Chinese higher education continued to grow in 2005. The total enrolment reached 23 million, with a national overall enrolment rate of 21 per cent of the 18-24 age cohorts. Chinese regular higher education institutions admitted 5,004,600 new students, and overall enrolments reached 15,617,800. These were 364,800 newly admitted graduate students, including 54,800 and 310,000 respectively at doctoral and masters levels. The overall enrolment of graduate students reached 978,600, of which 191,300 were at doctoral level and 787,300 at masters level (Yang, 2007).

As consumer demands and the role of marketing communication grow in the region, I believe so too does the demand for practitioner expertise. Countries in Europe, the US and Australia have taken decades to amass expertise in marketing communications.

Now countries in the Asia Pacific region are embracing the acquisition of this expertise and skills development at expedient rates.

In reviewing contemporary statistics relating to advertising expenditure in the region provided by the Advertising Federation of Advertising Associations (AFAA) in their study 'Advertising Trends of Asia Pacific 2005', one can see that the advertising spends in emerging markets such as China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand are growing at a far greater rate than those of a mature market such as Australia (AFAA, 2004). For example, and according to Yang (2007), China has been able to distil centuries of development in the west into 30 years of phenomenal growth.

A national strategy

It is recognised that within the booming business and consumer marketplaces of China and the Asia Pacific region, there is a demand for an international standard and a global approach to advertising and broader marketing communication education at a tertiary (higher education) level. In a recent article in the respected Australian tertiary education publication *Campus Review*, it was noted that higher education is now more important than at any time in history, and that global, national and local roles and relationships create a transparency amongst higher education institutions (Marginson, May 2007, p 8-9).

Australian higher education has been positioned internationally by history and geography, suggests Marginson. However global communications and mobility have created conditions for the emergence of an international market in higher education for Australia. Australia is located geographically at the south-eastern tip of the Asian continent, close to the emerging university systems of three of the most populated nations on earth: China, India and Indonesia. According to Marginson, Australian higher education institutions have made good but not great position, taking advantage of their location in Asia Pacific region. Climate and proximity to Asia constitute a firmer competitive advantage, as does our growing affinity with the Asian culture through our own immigration policies. Australia provides a regional alternative for Asian students wanting to enter Anglo-American programs, and to the extent that supply fosters demand, this has facilitated significant student movement out of Asia. However, my belief is that these factors are of secondary importance if Asian students believe that the better education product is elsewhere.

I'd argue that in addition to building strong markets, we have also become far more engaged with South East Asian and Chinese universities than our British, American and European counterparts. In doing so, we have become a desired destination for students looking to undertake an international standard education.

I would suggest that a key national priority for our country is to position Australia as a centre for excellence in education. DFAT (the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) suggests that "engendering a greater understanding of Australia's identity, values and ideas, and ensuring that our international image is contemporary, dynamic and positive" is inherent in the ways in which a nation's influence, objectives and standing throughout the world are promoted and enhanced. Simply, our reputation in the field of higher education, content and delivery is paramount. The flow-on effect of this is that

education providers bring together scholars, business and industry representatives, government agencies and community organisations for the betterment of the countries involved. This nationalist philosophy is echoed world-wide. In the United States of America, Undersecretary of State Karen Hughes argued that there was “no doubt in my mind that student exchanges have been our single most effective public diplomacy tool for the past 50 years...” (Wells, April 2007, p7).

A ‘softly, softly’ approach

Whilst I concur with this sentiment from Hughes in terms of the similar benefits to my own country and to our higher educational institutions, my own strategy in embarking on international engagement is to proceed with caution – “softly, softly”. Racing headlong into global markets in the name of public diplomacy or revenue generation can be disastrous, for whilst reputations take years to build, they can be destroyed in a very short period of time by one wrong decision. A case in point is the recent highly publicised establishment of a campus in Singapore by a leading Australian university and then its subsequent withdrawal after only one semester of operation. Not only has this been an apparent disastrous foray into the international market, with students displaced and lecturers’ positions terminated (Campus Review, April 2007, p.9), it has arguably done significant damage to the institution’s (and possibly even to the sector’s) reputation as a global education provider.

It is apparent that China and the Asia Pacific region represent significant opportunities for Australian higher education providers, nationally and trans-nationally. However, exuberance should be tempered with rational sound business thinking. My overarching belief is that we must demonstrate both an understanding of, and an empathy with the markets and organisations with which we seek to become involved. We must clearly acknowledge that there is something in it for all stakeholders- the universities, their faculty and students, as well as for the host countries. We must practice patience and demonstrate a commitment for the long haul. Currently in the Asia Pacific region I have established relationships with tertiary institutions and universities in China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore and we are currently in discussions with institutions in New Delhi and Madras in India and Suva in Fiji. Some relationships are relatively new, others are long standing. They are in the main relationships that are based on articulation programs, and they provide reciprocal benefits for all partners. They are built on trust between institutions and individuals, as well as an appreciation of what both partners bring to the table. This includes the provision of appropriate curricula, scholarship programs, faculty and student exchanges, international internship programs, study tour programs and cooperative marketing initiatives.

In many ways, I liken the current situation in the provision of international education to the ‘dot.com’ boom of the ‘90s. A huge flurry of activity as the realisation that the provision of global education was potentially a huge revenue source, inevitably followed by a rationalisation of the ‘serious’ education providers. This, combined with the edicts of some countries in terms of their own higher education institution delivery strategies, is seeing the essential maturing of the global education environment.

According to a recent AEI report, Australia's international student numbers increased by 11 per cent in 2006 (Campus Review, March 2007, p.4). Interestingly, the same AEI report that announced this increase in international student numbers warned that "the numbers in traditional markets in South-East Asia, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia are either static or in the decline as a result of those countries having gone through their rapid growth and industrial phases. Their education systems are catching up and a higher proportion of students are able to study at home than were able to in the past." (AEI, 2007).

My personal experience tends to contradict this. For example, in the calendar year 2007, 30 per cent of the final year student cohort in the flagship Communication-Advertising undergraduate (bachelor) course at CSU is international students (CSU Enrolments, 2007). This 2007 cohort comprises students from Korea, Malaysia, Canada and Sri Lanka, all entering undergraduate courses via articulations programs I have established with overseas partners. In the main these programs are based on a 2+1 model that sees students completing the equivalent of a two (2) year diploma or advanced diploma in their home country and then articulating to CSU to complete the final year of our three (3) year degree programs as full fee-paying internal students. In many instances, DE (distance education) delivery options are offered to provide international students with greater study flexibility. This allows them to gain an international education whilst, as the AEI report expresses it, allowing them to study at home.

My belief is that strong associations developed with respected tertiary trans-national educational providers – our partners in the Asia Pacific region – which are based on trust and mutual benefit will continue to provide a platform for the development and application of benchmark strategies for internationally student teaching and learning for Australian universities. Here I stress the aspects of mutual benefit. Internationalism for Australian universities should strengthen the quality of academia within those universities and their partners. It should also contribute to the learning of all university students, international and indigenous, by creating a true global community of both on-campus and, the case of DE delivery, online scholars.

2. Developing international teaching and learning strategies

When I first entered the marketing communications industry workforce 30 years ago, formal tertiary qualifications were simply not available for professions such as advertising. Teaching was very much 'on the job', education was simply about learning as one went, and internationalism was not even a consideration. Today, teaching and learning strategies are changing as the contemporary view of effective education is to prepare students for participation in professional practice (McCulloch, 2005). Universities are under increasing pressure from both employers and students to equip graduates with real-world skills and capabilities that reflect a global perspective.

As Morris (2005) indicates, it is becoming apparent that employers are seeking qualifications beyond the framed degree. They want hands-on skills, employees who are good communicators, team players and are dedicated to life-long learning. Executive

Director of the Australian Association of Graduate Employers, Ben Reeves sites industry experience undertaken by students during their final university year as being worth more on a resume than top-ranking academic results (Reeves, 2005). Joanne Tyler from the National Association of Careers Advisors concurs, stating that today most undergraduate courses include a mandatory internship period to “chalk up some experience” while they are studying, integrating industry experience into a university course (Tyler, 2005).

It is my belief that, in line with the evolving profile of the university graduate, teaching and learning strategies are changing as the global view of education is to prepare students for participation in professional practice. Vocational teaching and learning models today embrace the concept of hands-on learning via constructs such as communities of practice, situated learning and authentic problem-based learning. In effect, the equipping of students to become effective, efficient and ethical individuals who can contribute meaningfully to any system in which they choose to work and prosper in an economic sense (Wee Keng Neo, 2004).

Much has been written in the literature concerning vocational teaching and learning and the notion of strategies such as problem-based learning. But what is problem-based learning, or more specifically *authentic* problem-based learning (APBL)? How may these strategies be effectively assimilated into teaching and learning practice, and importantly, how do they relate to the values required in the global workplace? To what degree does the notion of authentic problem-based learning better prepare students for the real world? Here I refer specifically to the work of Wee Keng Neo, Linda (2004) in APBL and her notion of placing students at the very centre of an authentic learning.

This paper takes as a case study the teaching and learning strategies employed at my own University and is informed by data collected during the period February 2007 to July 2007. It discusses the constructs of situated learning, communities of practice and authentic problem-based learning, and specifically how these theoretical frameworks underpin the professional practice models employed within Kajulu Communications, the on-campus student advertising agency of Charles Sturt University. The relevance of this case study lies in the application of teaching and learning strategies employed in curriculum delivery within the working environment of Kajulu Communications, and the preparation of the international and indigenous student cohort for professional practice utilising methods encompassing authentic problem-solving.

Finally, the paper reports on research undertaken and analyses the effectiveness of pedagogical practices that naturally connect learning to authentic activity, context and culture. It describes the activities undertaken within Kajulu Communications that relate directly to authentic problem-based learning, and explains the cognitive demands that are inextricably linked to the industry-professional environment in which students work and learn. In doing so, the paper acknowledges the commitment of my own University to the discovery and advancement of knowledge and the development of mechanisms for transferring knowledge via its vision as ‘an internationally university for excellence in education for the professions’ (CSU, 2007).

3. Theoretical constructs

The notion of *situated learning* is central to the concept of preparing students for professional practice within the environment of Kajulu Communications. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), situated learning takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs. Rather than defining it as the acquisition of propositional knowledge, Lave and Wenger situate learning in certain forms of social co-participation. Rather than asking what kinds of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place, accepting that learning takes place via participation, not in an individual's mind. Wenger (1998) notes that institutions (universities), to the extent that they address issues of learning explicitly, are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, with a beginning and end, and is best separated from the rest of human activities. Wenger argues that the institutionalised teaching and training environments of lecture halls, tutorial rooms and computer labs conspire to confirm the impression by would-be learners that learning is boring and arduous – the teacher teaches, the student listens – a one-way flow of information. In effect, an individual exercise. Savery and Duffy (1995) add crucial support to this perspective, reinforcing the importance of situation, or environment. They emphasise the aspects of the replication of real life situations in which teaching and learning takes place, i.e. experiences that could confront students in future professional life. This then combines the concepts of the quality of teaching and the context in which the teaching activity occurs, in terms of definable outcomes.

In arguing against the constraints of institutionalised learning, Wenger (1998) introduces the concept of *communities of practice*, maintaining that communities of practice are an integral part of daily life and are therefore familiar and comfortable environments in which to exist and to learn. For many of us, the concept of learning immediately conjures up images of classrooms, teachers and textbooks. Wenger maintains that for individuals, learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practice of communities. For communities, it means that learning is about refining the practice and ensuring new generations of members. Hence, learning is not only more enjoyable, it is more effective when undertaken within the 'community' environment. This must certainly apply then to a global community of learners.

Where Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss the notion of learning via situations, and Wenger (1998) suggests that learning is naturally enhanced via community participation, Wee Keng Neo (2004) introduces the notion of *authentic problem-based learning* (APBL) – students working in small groups (communities) with a facilitator (teacher) who facilitates their learning and stimulates their thinking as they work through authentic, real-world tasks. Students are given real problems (tasks) that they will encounter in their professional practice. They are also given the challenge of assuming responsibility for their own learning, using the problems that they are to solve to indicate what they need to learn. Students therefore are better prepared to be effective self-learners and are able to handle new problems as they arise. Gulikers, Bastiaens & Kirschner (2004) endorse this concept, maintaining that an authentic task is a problem task that confronts students with activities

that are also carried out in professional practice, claiming that an authentic task is therefore critical for authentic assessment. Wee Keng Neo (2004) suggests that APBL is designed to achieve effective education outcomes. Specifically, the acquisition of an integrated body of knowledge that can be re-called, adapted and applied when needed. As well it fosters the development of skills in reasoning and problem-solving, self-directed learning, collaboration and communication that allow students to address the real-world problems that they will encounter in the workplace.

APBL sees learning as integrative, not fragmented or compartmentalised. In contrast to traditional 'chalk and talk' rote learning methodologies, authentic problem-based learning has a significant bearing on how students can recall and apply what they have learned outside the classroom. APBL is central to the way my students work in Kajulu Communications and, as the research presented here suggests, it is a major contributor to their success both within the classroom as students and within the workforce as graduates. As Barrows (2000) notes, upon graduation students will be able to perform immediately and seamlessly on the job, instead of being able to just recall and do well on written tests of recognition and recall, which the conventional lecture-tutorial approaches are able to accomplish.

The final theoretical construct I believe, is the method of assessment. Newmann (1992) claims that the true criteria for authenticity may be reflected in three ways: assessment tasks, instruction and student performance. Gulikers et al (2004) argue that in order to meet the goals of education, there needs to be a constructive alignment between instruction, learning and assessment. Traditional front-of-class teaching is an example of such an alignment characterised as instructional approach-knowledge transmission (also referred to as 'rote' learning), and is assessed purely on the basis of knowledge acquisition via traditional text book assignments and tests. They maintain that today's educational goals should focus more on the development of competent students and future employees than on simple knowledge acquisition. Here they state that the goal of assessment is the development of higher-order thinking processes and competencies rather than simple factual knowledge and basic skills. Wee Keng Neo (2004) concurs, stating that APBL must be supported by a body of evidence that determines that it works in delivering what is specified in the education outcomes, specifically, the acquisition of integrated knowledge and the development of skills in reasoning, problem solving, communication and self-directed learning. This parallels my expectations of a CSU graduate in that they should have the ability to learn and to work both independently and collaboratively, exercise reflective and critical judgment and importantly, be able to apply this knowledge in the workplace.

Birenbaun and Dochy (1996) characterise authentic assessments, noting that students have a responsibility for their own learning, requiring that they reflect, collaborate and conduct continuous dialogue with their teacher. Here they maintain that assessment involves real-world, or authentic tasks and contexts as well as multiple assessment opportunities and methods to reach a profile score for the determination of student learning and development. In essence, reflecting the concept of authentic problem-based learning. Brown, Collins & Duguid (1989) introduce the notion of cognitive apprenticeship, or the development of

concepts through continues authentic activity. Cognitive apprenticeship supports learning in the environment by enabling students to acquire, develop and use cognitive tools in an authentic activity – a real world situation. In this environment, teachers (facilitators) make explicit their tactical knowledge by modeling strategies in an authentic activity then support students as they undertake the tasks. Finally, they empower students to continue independently, thereby advancing the concept of continuous self-directed learning.

A global community of scholars

Regardless of individual points of view and definitions of the myriad methodologies, many researchers seem to agree that teaching and learning strategies are changing significantly. In the specific field of marketing communication and advertising the requirement is for graduates with real-world skills who can ‘hit the ground running’. That is, graduates who are equipped with the skills needed to be effective and successful in the highly competitive multi-cultural world of global marketing communication.

Teaching strengths and characteristics are expressed as a positive and differentiating characteristic. Berryman (1997) would seem to support the position of both Lave and Wenger (1998) and Barrows (2000), stating that the ultimate point of education is to prepare students for effective functioning in non-school settings. Further I believe that it is essential that our teaching and learning strategies prepare students to take their place, not simply as practitioners but also as global citizens, armed with the skills necessary to deal with the complex issues of a multi-cultural and multi-dimensional marketplace. For advertising is a global industry where there is a requirement to be able to deal effectively with the ethical and social issues that communication with the converging commonality of a global marketplace brings. It is also an industry in which no two days are the same, and practitioners are continually called upon to solve problems for the clients. It is an industry that seeks out ‘big picture’ visionaries, reflective thinkers and problem-solvers.

I believe that today a university must be more than lecture halls and tutorial rooms. It must be a place where students from all around the world come to learn, and to learn about themselves. Within the School of Communication at Charles Sturt University, I employ a strategy of problem-based, open thinking and team-orientated collaborative study. The Charles Sturt University Advertising degree is recognised internationally by both the education sector and the broader marketing communication and business sectors. Indeed, as a result of its significant successes in global advertising competitions such as InterAd, it is considered a benchmark by the International Advertising Association (IAA), the peak global industry body for international student teaching and learning.

Many congratulations to your inspiring team for the excellence of both your InterAd entry and presentation. You have just raised the bar considerably for all future InterAd competitions.

(Michael Lee. World President and CEO of the IAA, 2005)

The awarding of IAA InterAd World Championships in 1999, 2002 and again in 2005 acknowledges the calibre of the teaching and learning strategies employed at Charles Sturt University, and positions the CSU Advertising course as the most awarded IAA accredited advertising course in the world to date.

The Kajulu Communications win is testimony to their communication learning strategies which set a benchmark for all other institutions.

(Professor Ian Goulter. Vice-Chancellor Charles Sturt University, 2002)

4. Teaching and learning within the industry-professional environment of Kajulu Communications: a case study

Within the School of Communication at Charles Sturt University the distance between the classroom and the professional community is closing. The evolution of professional practice and authentic problem-based learning began in 1999 with the establishment of the student advertising agency Kajulu Communications. Kajulu Communications replicates a real advertising agency in every way; from systems, procedures and student roles and responsibilities founded in professional practice, to actual tasks for real clients. From authentic briefs to the development and presentation of industry-standard integrated marketing communication campaigns for national and international organisations. Students in Kajulu develop campaigns that are ready to go to market. In doing so they are taking the learning process out of the realm to the traditional student assignment and exemplifying the innovative approaches of self-directed learning inherent in the concept of authentic problem-based learning. That is, the application of teaching and learning strategies that position Kajulu students at the very centre of their learning.

Kajulu Communications is a stand-alone entity on campus, responsible for its own premises and equipment. Final year advertising students leave the traditional lecture halls and tutorial rooms behind as they work exclusively in the situated learning environment of the Kajulu advertising agency, in effect completing a full year's practical internship whilst still at university. Everything about Kajulu Communications is designed to meet the requirements of the professional environment, from the agency's physical premises to the collaborative work-based approach students take in the development and presentation of marketing communication campaigns that go well beyond student assignments.

The first thing one notices about Kajulu is that it actually looks and feels like an advertising agency, exemplifying the philosophies of situated learning. Gulikers et al (2004) refer to this as the 'physical context', the location and surrounds where learning will happen. Brown et al (1989) and Herrington and Oliver (2000) state that the physical context should reflect the way knowledge will be gained and skills and attitudes applied in professional practice.

Within Kajulu, students operate in advertising agency teams, as they would in professional practice. The total student cohort is self-selected into teams of, on average, seven (7) students. This sees international and Australian students working together in agency teams, as they would in industry. The benefits are numerous and reciprocal in that the Australian students are exposed to international student perspectives, both professionally and culturally, and our international students learn to work collaboratively in their 'adopted' cultural and professional environment. Team members accept specific practitioner roles and maintain these roles during their professional working time in Kajulu.

In addition to being exposed to the latest theories and professional practices, Kajulu students are required to apply them to authentic situations for the client organisations. The philosophy of Kajulu reflects a culture of professional practice and the authentic problem-based learning model employed, and exemplifies Barrows (2000) belief that students should be able to perform immediately and seamlessly on the job. The philosophy is expressed:

When you leave CSU and Kajulu you are more than simply graduating. You are leaving one advertising agency and moving on to another.

(Rod McCulloch, Senior Lecturer-Course Coordinator, 2002)

5. Real-world situations and processes

Newmann (1992) proposes an integrated conception of authentic intellectual achievement based on three (3) criteria: the development of student knowledge through disciplined enquiry beyond the classroom; disciplined enquiry that replicates the skills and techniques of professionals; and finally, reflection and simulation of problems, issues and situations encountered in the real world. Kajulu mirrors Newmann's model in meeting the theoretical constructs outlined earlier in this paper. Students work on the development of marketing communication solutions, based on authentic briefs for real clients such as Sony Audio, Electrolux and Estee Lauder Cosmetics. They do this within the situated learning environment of Kajulu Communications. They learn and work in professional *communities of practice* - Kajulu agency teams. Students reflect upon the knowledge gained in the first two years of their bachelor course, and enhance this with on-going learning and instruction from their facilitator during their final year. They apply acquired skills and professional processes to identify consumer insights through applied research activities, to formulate communication strategies, and to present final recommendations to their clients.

I really enjoyed creating an advertising agency from scratch within my team. I think it was a great way to get to know how an agency operates. I really think the information provided in this subject will advantage us when we enter the industry.

(Final year advertising student feedback, 2006)

Often more than one team will be 'pitching' for the client's business, adding the authentic dimension of real-world competition to the learning process. This spirit of competition, combined with authentic industry timeframes for the development of campaigns, the knowledge that the client is paying for the work being undertaken, and the healthy stress of presenting to the client in person results in a commitment by students to a standard of work that goes well beyond that of the assignment.

What an excellent experience. It was encouraging to see such good work come our way – congratulations to the Kajulu team.

(David Woolbank. Director-Brand Marketing, Electrolux, 2004)

6. Real-world assessment

Traditionally, assessment methods are predicated on students answering or completing set assignment tasks. In the main, these tasks are theoretical and text-book driven. Hence, answers tend to reflect readings from the text without the requirement to reflect on learning

or the desire to venture further in the assimilation of knowledge or the development of arguments. Within the industry-professional environment of Kajulu, student assessment is based on authentic tasks, a demonstration of student-initiated reflective practice and progressive argument, in line with nominated teaching and learning outcomes and critically, client and industry expectations.

Specifically, and in line with the principles of authentic problem based learning, assessment is based on: clear and relevant education outcomes; is supported by a list of tangible, measurable and unambiguous criteria; is based on targets of measurement (not emotions); is conducted with a variety of tools for each assessment task; comprises formative and summative assessments; and manages and influences student learning through the learning process (Wee Keng Neo, 2004).

Within Kajulu, a 360 degree or ‘orbital’ model of assessment is implemented in four (4) phases:

Team Assessment: Client campaign development and presentation is assessed utilizing the following industry criteria:

- Team (agency) presentation
- Presentation content (in written report form) - breadth and originality, practicality, the addressing of set objectives, evaluation and anticipated ROI

Individual Student Assessment: To identify individual student contribution and learning, within the collaborative team environment:

- Progressive learning assessment – weekly reviews and mini-tests
- Content assessment

Peer Assessment: Written (confidential) feedback by members of the Kajulu agency team on aspects of fellow team member commitment and contribution.

Client Assessment: Evaluation by the client, not simply based on outcomes, but also on the professionalism displayed by the Kajulu agency throughout the entire campaign development process.

Outstanding! A huge amount of work and initiative. RFDS (Royal Flying Doctor Service) will greatly benefit from the contributions received. The future of the advertising industry is in good hands.

(IAA Australia ‘Big Idea’ Chairman of Judges, 2006)

Primarily assessment serves as a form of feed-back mechanism that allows the facilitator and the student to determine the progress of student learning and to take the necessary measures to close any learning gaps. Therefore, assessment cannot be perceived as the end of the process, but rather integral to the on-going process. ‘Learning by doing’ and then applying what is learned is inherent in the way students develop their knowledge base in Kajulu. Continuous feedback from the facilitator, as well as from their client informs final outcomes and develops a quality and maturity of graduate professionalism that has helped

established the reputation of the Charles Sturt University BA Communication-Advertising course nationally and internationally.

7. Evaluating the effectiveness of the Kajulu model

Overview

Since its inception in 1999, Kajulu Communications has graduated almost 250 students in the Bachelor of Arts (Communication-Advertising). Over 20% of these are international students who have come to CSU to complete their undergraduate degrees from our overseas partners. Graduate employment rates are almost 100% (CSU Graduate Outcomes, 2006).

Since 1999, Kajulu Communications has won the International Advertising Association's InterAd World Advertising Championship three (3) times – in 1999, 2002 and 2005, competing against over 75 universities and tertiary institutions worldwide in the development of marketing communication campaigns for global clients including Visa Card, Newsweek Magazine, Florida Tourism, Compaq Computers, Yahoo! and the United Nations. In Australia, Kajulu Communications has won the IAA 'Big Idea' Australian national advertising competition three of the four years it has been conducted – 2003, 2004 and 2006. Combined, these successes position the CSU Advertising course as the most awarded IAA accredited course in the world to date. In 2005, the Advertising course was awarded Nationally Outstanding status by the Australian Council of Universities.

Whilst these achievements reflect overall student cohort and course performance, and are now a matter of record, no specific research has been undertaken in recent times amongst the students themselves to quantify the effectiveness or otherwise of the Kajulu model in relation to teaching and learning outcomes. Hence, in May/June 2007 a research study was implemented to examine student learning outcomes, specifically in relation to the constructs of situated learning, communities of practice and problem-based learning, within the context of Kajulu Communications.

Theoretical orientation

Previous research undertaken amongst Advertising students has either been broad-based quantitative 'exit studies', or has been qualitative in approach, seeking to identify insights in relation to students' attitudes to the course. The purpose then of this most current research study was to clearly identify and quantify specific outcomes of current teaching and learning methodologies within the learning environment of Kajulu Communications.

In deciding on a research approach, and based on existing practitioner experience and knowledge in informing a working hypothesis, the research methodology used employed a deductive approach to test the practical application of the hypothesis.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) argue that knowledge of the different research traditions enables one to adapt or adopt research design to cater for constraints such as availability to data, populations and time. As the research outcomes required were information-based, as opposed to insight-based, the research employed a quantitative survey strategy. Additionally, this allowed the researcher-practitioner to gather large

amounts of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way. The principal research instrument was a survey questionnaire. To ensure that the research addressed the key issues, initial interviews were undertaken with selected participants within the population to 'get a feel' for the key issues before embarking on the questionnaire. The survey utilized a Likert scale, rated from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree with an Item Mean score to be determined. The survey consisted of 51 closed-ended questions to provide greater uniformity of response and facilitate easy processing. The answer categories were mutually exclusive to avoid ambiguity and to ensure that the respondent 'circled' just one.

Structured question types included:

- Factual knowledge relating to the advertising subject taught in Kajulu;
- Beliefs and perceptions relating to personal skills development;
- Orientations relating to Kajulu Communications as an entity;
- Opinions relating to Kajulu as a learning environment.

The population sampled was the entire cohort of the principal first semester final year subject taught in Kajulu, and comprised 56 students in total. The surveys were distributed to the cohort. Respondents' willingness to complete the survey was sought and the essential ethical aspects of voluntary completion and confidentiality were explained in detail prior to the distribution of the survey. As Baxter & Babbie (2004) suggest, because of the nature of the cohort and geographic location of the population to be surveyed, the survey was self-administered, that is distributed to the students during a scheduled class session. They were given an appropriate amount of time to complete it. In line with the confidential nature of the instrument, no personal or identifying information was sought. 44 completed surveys were returned, representing 77% of the total population.

Summary of findings

Of a possible Item Mean score of 5.0, all 51 questions (100%) scored over 3.5 indicating that in the main, the respondents Strongly Agreed or Agreed. The lowest Item Mean was 3.68. Of the 51 questions 38 (75%) scored an Item Mean above 4.0.

When responses were analysed, the overall take-out of the study was the stated confidence amongst students that they were being well prepared to effectively and competitively enter the professional industry environment – and to be productive from day one.

Supporting this overall outcome were specific findings relating to the following constructs:

Authentic problem-based learning

- Overall, this subject stimulated my learning:
95.5 Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.39*)
- Working on an authentic client project assisted my learning:
100% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item mean 4.73*)
- The assessment tasks were authentic and were appropriate for the subject:
100% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.39*)
- I believe that the pressures and challenges involved in authentic problem-solving are a beneficial part of the learning experience:
97.7% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.45*)

The notion of learning by being involved in authentic problem-solving mirrors the real world so that the behaviours of the real world are now being modeled and supported in the learning environment (Wee Keng Neo, 2004). Results from the survey would appear to support APBL, and indicate that the concept of authentic problem-based learning was well accepted by the cohort and that it was seen to be a valuable aid to their learning. Project assessment results and feedback from Kajulu clients add credence to this.

Situated learning and communities of practice

- The subject improved my overall professional knowledge and understanding:
100% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.41*)
- Working in Kajulu in a team-based, collaborative environment assisted my learning:
81.8% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.2*)
- I have improved my team work and collaborative skills:
87.3% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.07*)
- I have learned to work more effectively in a collaborative team environment:
84.1% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.05*)
- Kajulu is a motivational environment in which to work:
88.6% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.30*)
- Working in Kajulu encourages and enhances the spirit of team work:
81.8% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.14*)
- The industry-professional environment in Kajulu enhanced my learning experience:
79.5% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.05*)

Albanese (2000) as cited in Wee Keng Neo (2004) defines cooperative learning as a situation where students perceive that they can reach their learning goals only if they work with their group in synergy. Lave & Wenger (2001) suggest that learning is enhanced when students learn in actual practitioner environments and in a cooperative (community) environment. According to Wee Keng Neo (2004), a key outcome of authentic problem-based learning is the mutual respect displayed by students in such environments, in that they are 'expert-based' in their own fields of activity. During the cooperative team-work sessions, students are actively engaged in the exchange of ideas and materials that they had prepared. (p. 168).

Working within the industry-professional environment is seen to be a valuable asset to the student cohort. High Item Means identified in the research study indicate that students feel that it has improved both their professional skills and their team skills. This is important for assimilation into the real world and professional practice. Their ability to be independent and their own self confidence proves that empowering the student is the key to effective learning.

Self learning

- The subject allowed me to self-direct my own learning:
68.3% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 3.84*)
- I have learned how to take charge of my own learning:
70.4% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 3.98*)
- I was given guidance on how to progressively improve my work:
69.5% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 3.77*)

- I have improved my reasoning and problem-solving skills:

75.0% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 3.86*)

- I feel more confident in myself:

72.7% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.11*)

Above average Item Mean scores indicate that overall the model is successful, but lower than 4.0 Item Means in some specific instances suggest that more emphasis could be placed assisting students in taking control of their own learning, possibly through additional consultation and detailed feed-back. This is supported by the fact that when questioned specifically about personal development, nearly 81.8% of the cohort indicated that they see “Taking charge of your own learning” as Very Important/Important.

Specific skills development

Questions relating to Specific Skills Development returned Item Mean scores in the 4.0+ range, with one exception. This exception related to managing advertising budgets. Overall, it appears that students recognise that the subject content, teaching and learning methods and the overall Kajulu ‘experience’ have had a positive influence on the development of essential professional/personal skills. These results also suggest that students have been able to master the concept of self-learning.

Future prospects

- I believe that working in Kajulu will enhance my employment prospects:

81.6% Strongly Agree/Agree (*Item Mean 4.23*)

Reviewing the key aspects of the Kajulu curriculum, the data from this research would seem to support the authentic problem-based learning model employed, specifically that of student teams working on real client projects within the cognitive learning environment of Kajulu Communications. As Wee Keng Neo, Linda (2004), states “APBL is a way of life to build a learning society.” (p. 156).

Additionally, it enhances the notion of ‘internationalism’, the integration of Australian and international students into agency teams, bound together by the common practitioner requirements of solving real-world client problems in a highly competitive market global environment.

Invariably, in any marketing communications environment, final evaluation of success or otherwise is made by the market. Within the Advertising course at Charles Sturt University this ‘market’ is firstly the students themselves and their evaluation of the course in terms of learning outcomes.

Everything I learned in the course I have implemented in my working environment.

Great course that has taken me places.

(Final year Advertising graduate, 2006)

Secondly, it is the demand from Australian and international students vying for places in the course.

I loved Kajulu, and I am proud to be an IACT and CSU Graduate.

(IACT Malaysia international student graduate, 2005)

Because of you and your excellent course, I am set for an exciting journey in Korea where I will use the knowledge I have learnt.

(Korean international student graduate, 2005)

Finally, it is the industry itself, employers who seek out CSU graduates as their first preference.

Keep teaching these young people to the current high level, and we'll keep on employing them.

(Alan Griffiths. Business Director, Zenith Media, 2004)

The national and international awards and recognition, Kajulu graduate employment rates, and feedback from industry employers, and from the students themselves would appear to indicate that the Kajulu model and the notion of undertaking a full year 'internship' in Kajulu, working on authentic projects within situated team environments is addressing the professional practitioner requirements of the marketing communication industry in Australia and internationally.

Additionally, and critically, the success of the Advertising course and of Kajulu Communications serves to support the reputation of Charles Sturt University as 'an international university for excellence in education for the professions'.

Research is on-going. Data from the quantitative student surveys reviewed here, as well as future research will be used to guide advertising course structure and subject content, as well as to inform teaching and learning strategies.

8. Conclusion

Education is one of the fastest growing industries in the Asia Pacific region, and a national priority for Australia is to be positioned as a centre for excellence in education. Yet, as we have seen, exuberance in internationalism needs to be tempered with business acumen. My own strategy is to ensure regional knowledge and plan for the long term. In recent years I have watched my international student cohort grow and, in the process, enhance both their own life and learning experiences, as well as those of the Australian students that they are involved with.

My objective here has been to identify benchmark strategies for the preparation of students for professional practice and to reflect on my own international teaching and learning and experiences as a teacher/facilitator. In doing so, I acknowledge the essential role of the constructs of situated learning and communities of practice. In particular, I emphasise the importance of authentic problem-based learning, and how the theoretical framework underpins the professional practice models I employ in, as Lave & Wenger (2006) refer to it, the cooperative learning environment of Kajulu Communications, the student advertising agency of Charles Sturt University.

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Identification and alignment of graduate proficiencies in marketing communication: industry insights.

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Abstract

The marketing communication industry is experiencing an increasing 'velocity of change'. We are witnessing the industry evolving into the next business cycle and these changes are of a generation-altering nature. New consumer behaviour patterns, new technologies, and new strategies to keep up with both are driving a trend that is forcing a re-think in the content of the communications landscape as well as the skills and proficiencies needed by the next generation of marketing communication professionals. As a result, the industry is now experiencing an acute talent shortage. Universities are under real pressure from employers to equip their graduates with contemporary skills and capabilities to meet the immediate challenges of the new professional practice, the objective being to comprehensively prepare them for the rigors of the global industry that they are entering and to ensure their employability. This paper, the final in a series of three that has sought to investigate the attributes of university graduates entering the industry, sets out firstly to review the current state of the marketing communications industry and then to identify, by way of rigorous industry dialogue and investigation, insights into the development of graduate proficiencies to meet the demands of a new marketing communications industry landscape.

1. Introduction

A review of the literature relating to marketing communication, both academic and industry-specific, shows the communication industry undergoing a period of unprecedented change, arguably the greatest period of change in the over 100 year history of contemporary advertising communication. According to Michael Lee, executive director of the International Advertising Association (IAA), the industry is morphing into a new business cycle that is being driven by a combination of new technologies and increasing consumer power with arguably the greatest issue being manpower, or more correctly, the acute shortage of manpower with the skills and capabilities required to meet the demands of a new industry landscape (Lee, 2006). The purpose of this study was to gain insights as to the professional proficiencies sought by industry in graduates of tertiary/university courses entering the advertising professions. Accepting that advertising is a global industry and the role of universities is to prepare graduates for employment, this 2008 study seeks to identify not simply content (as did the McCulloch 2007 study into an advertising course review), but an international perspective of graduate attributes, knowledge and specific skills seen to be essential in today's and tomorrow's practitioner environment. Stakeholders in this study came entirely from industry and comprised:

- International educators from universities and tertiary colleges with advertising and marketing communication courses;
- International practitioners from advertising agencies and agency procurement companies;
- Australian practitioners from AFA accredited advertising agencies.

A review of the literature

According to Sir Martin Sorrell, CEO of WPP, the world's largest communication group, one of the next battlegrounds in the industry will be fought over people (Sorrell, 2008). Already manpower resources are stretched and there is an identified need for agencies to increase their investment in the people they hire, educate and develop. This will invariably mean investing in training and professional development programs and paying higher salaries to stop the 'brain drain'. Chris Walton, CEO of Mindshare Australasia maintains that continuous investment in training and retention of staff is an on-going need that the industry must face. The recycling of talent too is an issue. Poaching of skilled talent from one agency to another is a short term solution that invariably only serves to drive incomes up and return-on-staff investment down. In Australia, the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA) introduced the AFA Best Practice Accreditation Program in February 2006. The program requires accredited agency members to comply with the Trade Practices Act, various advertising codes and regulations and best practice human resources and occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) policies. It also requires agencies to provide an average of 24 hours of formal, professional training per permanent employee, per year under a Continuing Development Program. According to the AFA, by December 2007 over 70 of this country's largest national and multinational agencies had signed up as accredited members. Whilst this is an important initiative and benefits those currently working in the industry, it is apparent that more needs to be done to train new talent entering the industry. It may be argued that the real starting point for professional training needs to be with the universities and tertiary colleges that provide marketing communication graduate programs. As identified in a study into undergraduate attributes (McCulloch, 2007), the current market situation suggests that now more than ever these universities and university programs must ensure that they effectively prepare graduates for the rigors of the professions that they are entering, and considering the acute shortage of new talent, prepare them to be industry-ready to literally 'hit the ground running' (McCulloch, 2007).

Charles Sturt University Vice-Chancellor and President, Ian Goulter believes that in recent years curriculum has been neglected at the expense of learning and teaching. "While we are providing better learning and teaching environments, the question that is yet to be tested properly is whether what we are 'teaching well' is actually the best material." (Goulter, 2008). Goulter suggests that in areas such as high technology, learning is anywhere between three to five years out of date. "Teaching the wrong content brilliantly is not what is needed in Australian universities." (Goulter, 2008). Goulter maintains that content needs to be interrogated during universities' course reviews and as part of the course accreditation cycles performed for the professions. This strategy was interrogated in a paper that reviewed the lessons learned from an advertising course review at Charles Sturt University in 2007. Findings outlined in the paper supported the notion that such university programs, whilst pedagogically sound, need to have a realistic practitioner (industry) focus, to address

the specific demands of an international marketing communications industry (McCulloch, 2007).

Further, findings from the McCulloch study (2007) suggested that beyond specific discipline skills, often referred to as 'hard skills', there is a need for graduates to possess broad generic skills. An earlier study by Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) into the creation of future advertising leaders offered insights into the needs and attributes of practitioners and the implications for developing and nurturing them. This 2004 study identified generic attributes as the ability to communicate, to be insightful, inclusive of others, interactive in outlook and inventive in thinking.

The penetration and influence of new technologies, and in particular interactive consumer media referred to as Web 2.0², is challenging the very nature of communication and hence, the qualifications of the people who work in the industry. This would seem to support the notion that university advertising programs must focus on developing in students the attributes identified by Spence-Stone and Byrne (2004), specifically the ability to communicate clearly – to think, analyse, argue positively, reflect and challenge – not simply to 'create ads'.

Employability skills and influences on education

Leading business and employer groups have suggested that universities need to refocus attention on the issue of generic employability skills (O'Keeffe, 2008). Students questioned in a recent Graduate Careers Australia (GCA) survey (2007) suggested that "communication" and "learning" were their strongest skills. According to Patrick Coleman, policy director for education, skills and innovation with the Business Council of Australia (BCA), the survey reinforced the importance of giving students the opportunity to learn and practice these skills (Coleman, 2008). This supports the findings of previous work by McCulloch (2007) which suggests that industry wants graduates with hands-on skills who are good communicators, team players and are dedicated to life-long learning. A 2007 survey of 2,700 people conducted by career networking site LinkMe.com.au found that overall, employers believe that current university program structures do not adequately prepare students for the workforce. "Hands-on experience allows for the best transition into the workforce, but currently only 31% of Australian companies support a university graduate program, which reiterates the lack of support for graduates in Australia." (LinkMe, 2008) The findings support the beliefs of Goulter (2008) that there is an important role for universities in preparing graduates for the practicalities of the professions that they are entering.

Ben Reeves, chief executive of the Australian Association of Graduate Employers concurs with both Goulter's and Coleman's views, suggesting that employers are looking for universities, and the education system in general, to do a better job when it comes to teaching communication, learning and problem-solving skills (Reeves, 2008). Referring to a survey of 180 employers who were given a list of characteristics and asked to grade them accordingly (GCA, 2007), Reeves believes that a disconnect exists in terms of the expectations of universities and of employers, citing just 19% of employers surveyed being satisfied or very satisfied with graduates' problem solving skills. Tillbrook (2007) maintains that the greater the cooperation between universities and employers, the greater

the benefit to graduates. Coleman (2007) concludes “Graduates will benefit best when they are exposed to employability skills in both their university course and in their employment later.”

According to Carolyn Maloney, director of people management at OMD, Australia’s largest media agency group, everyone from all industries is talking about the nationwide shortage of talent. In the advertising industry specifically, there is an alarming shortage of both new and experienced people (Maloney, 2007). Agencies it would seem are talking about their focus on people and career development, but Maloney asks what are they doing to deliver? “If people are our most valuable commodity, is the industry – and particularly individual companies – doing enough to reward and recognize these people?” (Maloney, 2007).

The ‘Y’ factor

The advent of generation Y as the next generation of advertising professionals is adding additional pressure to the situation with the demands that this generation brings to the industry and to employers. According to the “Lifeblood” report undertaken by recruiter Colliers International (2006), a positive working culture, transparency, consultation on company direction, consideration for their well-being and flexible hours are amongst the demands of the Gen Y workforce. The report suggests that the next decade will prove increasingly challenging for businesses that do not develop strategies now to meet the imperatives of Gen Y as they unfold. Dane Brentnall of marketing recruitment specialist Stopgap identifies this new generation of job seekers as more confident, assertive and optimistic. “They know what they want and they are not afraid to ask for it.” (Brentnall, 2006). Maloney agrees, suggesting that reward and recognition isn’t just about money for Gen Y. “They need challenges and variety, look to charismatic leaders and mentors to help guide their careers, and need to continue their learning and development through internal and external training.” (Maloney, 2007).

Supporting the beliefs expressed by Maloney (2007), Brentnall maintains that career and progression should be paramount for employers wanting to attract the best generation Y candidates. “They are masters of the Internet and confident with technology, so their job research is done mainly online.” Brentnall maintains that managers will need to find effective forms of remuneration beyond simply money and companies should increase their investment in training and professional development, as an identified key motivator for this generation.

Managing director of the media recruitment agency ICUR, Belinda Kerr believes that attracting and keeping advertising graduates is now a problem for many agencies that in many instances are up against competitive salaries from larger companies as well as smaller independent creative and media start-ups. Brentnall (2007) suggests that generation Y job seekers, university graduates, have been brought up in a strong and abundant economy and will invest their time to find the position that caters to all their needs. “It is not unusual for them to leave their first job within 12 months.” Kerr (2007) agrees “You train up younger staff, then they go – there’s very little return on investment in that.” This would seem to indicate that the strategy must be one of retention, not simply recruitment.

So serious is the talent shortage problem in Australia that for the first time the industry has called a moratorium to discuss it. The Advertising Skills Summit, to be held in Sydney on 7 August 2008 will look at practical approaches, inspired case studies and emerging discussion. Event organizers suggest that it is designed to “buck the worrying trend in advertising and to initiate much needed action”. According to the AFA’s Russell Howcroft, advertising is seen as a ‘non-vocational’ industry with low barriers to entry and exit. Howcroft (2007) suggests that there is a need for the industry to promote advertising as a real career at universities and to demonstrate that the advertising industry and the agencies in particular take recruitment very seriously.

Graduate programs

A number of creative and media agencies have already instigated recruitment programs to accommodate the generation Y graduate population. Agencies including Clemenger BBDO (Benton, Barton, Dane and Osborne), Doyle, Dane and Burnbach (DDB), M&C Saatchi, Leo Burnett and Saatchi & Saatchi Australia all provide a trainee program for graduates straight from university. Students apply competitively in their final university year for a period of fully paid work placement at the conclusion of their degree programs. Invariably, this work placement of between three and nine months evolves into an offer of full time employment. Specifically within the media industry Maloney (2007) suggests that the dearth of graduate talent is a real cause for concern. Omnicom media agency OMD tackles the skill shortage in an alternative way to work placement by supporting an advertising graduate scholarship program at Charles Sturt University. Rather than waiting for students to complete their degree and then vying for the best of those graduating, OMD scholarships are offered to final year students, providing them with both a financial inducement as well as an internship with the company – before they have completed their studies. Invariably, this internship is the springboard to an offer of full time employment for the student at the conclusion of their studies.

The Advertising Federation of Australia attracts students into the industry through their AFA Graduate Trainee Program. The program is supported by industry and run in conjunction with universities. The objective is to provide practical on-the-job training throughout the period of the program. Students apply, are short-listed then offered placement in any one of a number of AFA-accredited agencies at the conclusion of their studies. Trainees are paid a basic salary during their training and agencies rotate graduates through account management, strategic planning, media, creative and TV/print production at their host agency. Each month a participating agency is asked to host a meeting and provide a guest speaker to give the trainees an insight into different agency cultures and processes. According to CEO of the AFA, Russell Howcroft, the program both identifies new talent and nurtures tomorrow’s leaders (Howcroft, 2007). An additional benefit to participating agencies is that the training time invested by both trainees and mentors counts towards that agency’s AFA best practice commitment.

For universities with programs in this sector, it would appear that the positive outcome of the current situation is that there is no shortage of jobs in marketing communication and advertising for their graduates in the foreseeable future. One might argue then that the

challenge for the academy is to recognize the magnitude of this increasing *velocity of change* within the industry and the need for emerging and specialist hands-on skills, and to work with industry to effectively prepare university graduates with realistic expectations for the demands of an industry that will forever more be subjected to massive change.

2. Agencies of Change

As the cliché goes, the only constant is change. This certainly appears true today where entire countries, economies, societies, ecology systems and technologies worldwide are experiencing unprecedented change. Sophocleous (2007) suggests that the speed of change in the advertising industry is unprecedented. “The change in the balance of power between corporates and the public, changes in media consumption through technology, changes in the way advertising and media agencies are structured and paid, changes in the way these two types of agencies work together, changes in the way marketers communicate with their audiences, changes in recruitment, retention and remuneration of staff, changes in the agency expectations of clients...the list of change goes on.”

“When you are through changing, you are through.”

Bruce Barton, Founder BBDO Advertising New York

Opportunity, or threat?

Discussions about the future of the industry are occupying agendas in industry forums, worldwide. The 41st World Advertising Congress convened in Washington DC in April 2008 by the world’s peak industry body, the International Advertising Association (IAA) was themed “What’s Coming Next?” – a title with an ominous relevance as the modern marketing and media communications industry faces the uncertainty of perhaps the biggest challenges of its over 100 years of existence. Changes that have been brought about by emerging technologies, increasing client demands for integration and the pressures of today’s influential consumer power. The mood in general seems to indicate that the future of advertising is bleak with some proponents suggesting that the advertising agency as we know it is about to be relegated to the status of a museum piece. According to Leach and Leach (2007), the real issue is not whether or not the old agency model is dead, or even which new model best represents the agency of the future, it is about opportunity and the recognition that the time has come for a paradigm shift. The industry needs to re-think how it can evolve to meet the needs of a changing client and consumer landscape. It needs to change the model from impersonal message delivery in favour of someone who has traditionally been ignored, the consumer.

There is consensus that the advertising industry landscape is changing. The increasing power of the consumer in information gathering and decision-making is one aspect of this change. The other is the plethora of communication vehicles and channels now available to inform decision-making. But arguably the most important change facing the industry is the changing face of the agency practitioner – younger, more tech-savvy and arguably more demanding in both what they want from their profession and how they want to live their lives.

Maloney (2007) describes this as the WIIFM factor – the *What's In It For Me?* factor. Industry bodies such as the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA) and the Media Federation of Australia (MFA) are working with a number of universities in accrediting advertising and media communication courses in an effort to attract graduates. Maloney suggests that agencies need to change their attitudes to staff recruitment and to be involved from the ground up in recruitment and training. Agencies need to step up and dedicate real time and resources to develop the talent of the future – at university level.

What is the agency of the future?

The industry appears to be in a state of flux. Industry commentators are asking “What does the agency of the future look like? Is it client driven? Consumer focused? Media neutral? Creatively led? Digitally enhanced? Or all of the above?” The overarching question currently being asked is “Will the agency of the future be a media agency that has turned its hand to creative? Will it continue to be the full service agency model that has sustained the industry for the last century? Will it be a content creator? Or will it be a ‘virtual’ entity that taps into specialist resources from satellite suppliers as and when they are required?” (Wakes-Miller, 2008). The literature and industry dialogue would seem to suggest that there will be a new model, though there appears no one single model agreed upon for the future. According to Sophocleous (2007), there is a need for a different way of working, and that the separation of media and creative into two distinct, competitive and often-times hostile entities, has actually harmed the quality of work being produced for clients. Rush (2007) concurs, suggesting that simply re-bundling, bringing media and creative back under the one roof, is not the solution. He argues that media agencies do not understand brands, and that media buyers do not have empathy for creative. Conversely, creative agencies appear to have little understanding of the channels through which the message will travel, but they do understand brands.

One model that has recently emerged is the ‘small is beautiful’ model. Inherently a strategic hub, it represents an alliance of smaller entities with specific skills and talents for the purpose of handling a client with specialist requirements. Wakes-Miller (2008) suggests that we can expect to see a proliferation of consultancies that embrace the ‘hub’ business model, arguing that as the skills shortage worsens, a lot of agencies simply won’t have the quality of people necessary to fully service their clients’ needs. “A lot of creative people, for example, will prefer to work ‘freelance’ because it frees up their thinking. It therefore makes sense to dial into this fantastic pool of talent to compile the best team of people as required to solve a specific client challenge.” (Wakes-Miller, 2008). One theory is that, as clients seek to maximize expenditure and minimize costs, they will look to eliminate overlap between their advertising, media, direct, PR, research and online supplier companies. They’ll use ‘hub’ consultancies, virtual agencies to act essentially as group account directors would in a traditional agency, to manage the development and implementation of their marketing communication activities.

Darren Woolley, MD of client pitch consultancy P3 (known in the industry as a procurement company), suggests that there is some disenchantment among clients with the big agencies. Woolley notes that in the past 100% of his business involved agency audits, reviewing agency performance on behalf of a client company. Today over 40% of the

business of P3 is search and selection, helping client companies negotiate contracts with agencies to rationalize their agency rosters. Clients are looking for new ways to work and marketers are seeking greater flexibility in the provision of specialist advertising service providers (Woolley, 2006). The industry historically has seen clients problem with this model utilising large ‘full service’ agencies for the total service. According to Woolley (2006), the emerging problem with this model appears to be that, with channel proliferation and a highly informed consumer, ‘one size fits all’ communication methods are not working. Clients find that in fact they do not get the best in every area. Clients who have bought into the all-in-one-bundle from their advertising agencies have been disappointed because they are invariably under-serviced or over-paying, and their agencies are under-delivering (Woolley, 2006). Murphy (2008) believes that no agency can truly call themselves full service when, as opposed to twenty years ago, there are so many different mediums to service. As a result, so-called specialist communication activities such as online are now being ‘farmed out’ to digital specialists. It therefore appears inevitable that, as the focus of communication turns more and more to digital and clients turn to niche providers for digital expertise, larger agencies may be forced to reduce their service offerings by reducing staff numbers or by selling off non-core ‘satellite’ divisions.

By contrast, smaller and younger consultancies will enjoy the benefits of being able to shape their businesses to suit evolving market conditions. According to Leach and Leach (2007), big agencies seem trapped by structures and are inherently conservative. Smaller agencies look for structural flexibility to suit their clients’ needs, including staffing strategies. They believe that the agency of the future, if not independent, will be independently minded, and will be client-needs driven, not internal systems driven. Leppard (2008) agrees, identifying an emerging trend of small and medium sized agencies performing beyond expectations and winning sizable clients. The end result, according to Leppard (2008) is that smaller agencies will get bigger and bigger agencies will get smaller as they themselves divide into smaller specialist entities.

Vadasz (2008) believes that agencies will need to better align with their clients, and not just with their communication needs, but with their total business needs. Agencies often talk about integration but client feedback suggests that they really do not understand their clients’ business well enough to deliver to them strategic communication solutions that will add value to their business. Increasingly there appears a desire on the part of marketers to work with the people who call the shots, independent thinkers who are not driven by a multinational agency group strategy. In the words of the IPA in the UK, these agencies are more “entrepreneurial, individualistic and challenging”. Does this spell the end of the global agency? The industry would seem to think not. However, according to Leach and Leach (2007), the agency of the future will develop new ways to present its agency service, new ways to collaborate with clients, new attitudes toward intellectual property (IP), new media and new content and most importantly, a new breed of practitioner.

Media and creative – the great divide

Arguably the greatest single change to the marketing communications agency landscape in recent years has been the evolution of the specialist media agency and the resultant split of the traditional full service advertising agency into two distinct entities: the media agency

and the creative agency. A decade ago, the divide opened up as media unbundled from advertising agencies. The resultant media organizations set up as independent operations - media agencies - specialising their roles and increasing their value and importance to clients. The advertising agencies continued to service the client as the 'agency of record', however with an increasingly isolated focus on the creative side. Upward (2008) maintains that media owners have never trusted agencies to sell their media as well as they could, even though the original charter of the advertising agency (or agent) was that of acting as an agent of the media. Not surprisingly then that the split in ranks between media and creative and the newly found dominance of the media agency is regarded by some as not only evolutionary but beneficial to the overall media communications industry (Upward, 2008).

New consumer behaviour patterns, new technology and new 'media-neutral' strategies to keep up with both are seen to be driving a trend that is forcing media agencies to develop a stronger strategic leadership role. Gauthier (2007) believes that advertisers should place media agencies ahead of creative agencies.

The way consumers receive information too has changed in the past decade and with it, the role of the media planner in determining the best way to reach a target audience. Some industry experts suggest that today the best way to reach an audience may be through public relations, direct marketing and online as opposed to mainstream or above-the-line media (Internationalist, 2007).

Not surprisingly, there are conflicting points of view regarding possible future scenarios. According to Hurrell (2007), in the UK, most agencies offer some form of media service. Hurrell (2007) suggests that the new agency model could see the strategic planner, media planner, creative, media buyer and account handler sitting next to one another. Chiang (2008) agrees with this, suggesting that there will be a re-bundling of creative, media and digital into one agency as it has always been. "One agency for one client. Just like old times." (Chiang, 2008). Globally there appears an emerging a growing demand among major marketers such as Procter & Gamble (P&G) for a single point of contact, the brand custodian. Chiang (2008) maintains that this model will deliver better, more integrated and more intelligent thinking. Tom Dery, executive chairman of M&C Saatchi Asia Pacific suggests that communications planning will move back into agencies stating that if creative agencies begin to embrace communications strategists, there could be a new phase of limited re-bundling of media and creative agencies (Dery, 2007).

However, in Australia, it appears that the opposite is true. The move to re-bundling (creative and media agency working as one) seems more remote. One reason put forward for this is that the size of the media budgets largely eclipse the creative and production budgets with the result that media agencies are increasingly positioned as the 'lead agency' on the client's business. MacLennan (2007) claims that in Australia, media buyers maintain that the 'horse has bolted' and media agencies are now too well established and independent to be aligned with creative again.

It appears however that there remains a shift in attitude towards an identified need by advertising agencies to consider strategic communications and the offering of a holistic, channel-neutral solution to their clients. CEO of Starcom, John Sintras notes “We find ourselves at the intersection of people; technology, content and brands, and the opportunities are enormous for those industry people who understand the power of that and want to make a real difference to the client’s business.” (Suntraps, 2007). Managing Director of OMD Media, Mark Coad believes that creative agencies will never re-bundle with media agencies. Coad claims that in reality, the market has moved on and today most media agencies don’t even share the same client base with the creative agencies from whence they evolved. If they do, they have failed to grow (Coad, 2008). Creative agencies have traditionally been the guardian of the brand. They know the brand, the client and consumer, and by default, enjoy the commanding position at the table (Skill, 2007).

However it appears that this is not the current situation, or indeed likely to be the future situation. Eskell (2007) suggests that creative agencies have a credibility problem in terms of the concept of integrated communication and with their ability to deliver across the multiple communication platforms. Media agencies, on the other hand, appear to be able to offer broader solutions, being the custodians of channel planning and communication and, more and more, as the originators of communication strategies on behalf of the client.

The issue now appears to have developed to be one of ‘turf wars’ as no one really knows how to classify what their remit is anymore. Where does the creative agency’s job begin and end, and what is the role of the media agency? Sintras (2007) notes that the first challenge for the media industry, and indeed the advertising industry as a whole, is to address the growing tension between creativity and media planning, suggesting that there has to be more collaboration between these two entities. From a skills perspective, Sintras (2007) sees an increased specialization and breadth of talent within media agencies over the next decade. Already we have seen roles that were traditionally the domain of the advertising agency – strategic planner, account manager, even creative – become commonplace within the media agency.

From an educator’s perspective, and as identified in the study by McCulloch (2007), there is a requirement then to ensure that the content of discipline courses such as advertising and marketing communication is both absolutely current and comprehensive. It is important that students are exposed to a breadth of professional perspectives to facilitate their education as practitioners in this new and, if anything confused marketing communications environment.

The digital media environment

According to Grant Arnott, editor in chief of Marketing Magazine’s Digital Media Survival Guide-2007, the digital phenomenon is permeating the globe at a ‘frightening’ rate (Arnott, 2007). Marketers are scrambling to keep up with the pace of change and identify opportunities to embrace digital media and the digital community is empowered with its own ability to spread information across the planet almost instantly, for free. Almost single-handedly, this impact of technology has moved the power-base from the marketer to the consumer (Arnott, 2007).

A recent survey by international research company Research & Markets Ltd (2008) provides an insight into the impact of new digital technologies on the global advertising industry. The survey identifies that whilst technology has played an important role in making things better, faster and in many cases, cheaper, it has also had a significant impact on user behaviour as well as business behaviour. Failure to adapt to changing technology is identified as the major reason why, in the U.S. the \$185 billion TV industry is now in, as the report terms it, “technology’s cross-hairs”. New-media advertising expenditure, including the Internet and mobile, will reach over US\$31 billion by 2011 (Research & Markets, 2008). The report provides an important perspective on the impact of new technologies and goes some way to identify why traditional ‘interruptive’ advertising strategies are having less impact.

According to Messer (2008), businesses that thrive in the immediate future will be those that aren’t reliant on one technology alone to deliver ideas, thereby introducing the notion of multi-channel, media neutral communication. A McKinsey Global Survey (2007) of marketing executives shows that in marketing, things are starting to change. Marketers are moving online across a spectrum of marketing activities, from building awareness to customer service. They now see online as an essential component of their marketing strategies. The report indicates a change in the foundations of digital strategy and a move away from traditional digital tools such as email and websites to wikis and virtual worlds as well as to the interactive and collaborative Web 2.0² technologies. In quantitative terms, the report highlights that companies using digital tools expect that by 2010 their companies will be getting 10% more of their sales from online channels. This represents twice as many companies as are at this point now. An additional 11% expect to spend a majority of their advertising budget online by 2010 (McKinsey, 2007). The report further identifies that today, most companies don’t integrate their online and offline marketing activities. On the other hand, companies that do use online tools across the full spectrum of marketing activities are much more likely to embrace this integration.

It is expected then that, with a growth in commitment to digital and online marketing activities, digital agencies will play a more centralized role on client rosters. In the new era, digital agencies would help to redefine product and services, using technology to maximize opportunities for consumer touch-points. According to P&G global marketing officer Jim Stengel, digital is not an emerging medium, it is *the* medium (Stengel, 2008). Stengel believes that the digitization of media enables advertisers to engage in a deeper level of conversation with consumers in a way that wasn’t possible previously.

Whilst agencies will continue to clamber for digital talent, core requirements will remain for creative and statistical thinkers. In other words for creative people with, as Matt Griffin of digital agency Deepend describes it, “a geeky side”. Agencies will simply become collections of really smart people who can switch from left to right brain thinking.” (Griffin, 2008). However, according to Kate Vale, head of sales and operations at Google, the greatest threat to digital will be lack of specifically trained talent. With the strength of the Australian economy and resultant high employment rate, the potential talent pool is small when one compares the growth of digital to the potential number of people entering the market (Vale, 2006). Vale believes that as yet, training and investment in skilled people

in digital is lagging behind other more mainstream communication areas. Nicolson (2006) believes that in Australia we are at a point where online marketing is emerging as a new profession but that it is still in an embryonic stage. People who have the skills and understanding are still in short supply. Nicholson (2006) maintains that many companies (agencies and clients) are simply paying lip-service to the concept of true online integration and that there are still many pretenders in the market who think that they ‘talk the talk and walk the walk’ (Nicholson, 2006).

In consideration of the future

The 41st IAA World Congress in Washington DC provided a platform for advertising leaders to offer their views on the future of the advertising agency. The world’s largest agency, Dentsu in Japan believes agencies need a new business model where they become equal business partners with their clients, being proactive rather than simply accepting and implementing assignments. They need to provide ‘new values’ such as new platforms for communication and new disciplines for business. Dentsu sees itself as a company of 17,000 entrepreneurs who “...challenge themselves to manage change courageously, take risks, and create unprecedented new values for their clients.” (Makati, 2008). Dentsu claims that entrepreneurship contributes to the organic growth of the company. Staff members are described as being insightful, original and innovative business partners (not simply ‘craftspeople’) whom their clients trust without reservation.

Publicis Group’s Maurice Levy agrees that the current agency model may be under pressure and “close to broken”, but believes that the industry’s best is yet to come. At the core of his vision is a new model of agency which he refers to as “the most important partner of advertisers to create, sustain and develop value for the sales of products and services.” (Levy, 2008). He identifies the successful attributes of this new agency as being neutral in putting the client’s business first, knowledgeable about today’s consumer, understanding of brand values, appreciative of advertising as an investment with an expected return on investment (ROI), and visionary. This final attribute relates directly to people. Levy describes this essential attribute as “Growing talent that is diverse and liquid enough to move quickly, grasp change and understand the moods of the consumer enough to provide the right message.” (Levy, 2008).

David Jones of international communications company, Euro Advertising believes that the biggest trend affecting today’s marketing world is ‘being good is good’ – embracing both green and socially responsible issues (Jones, 2008). His ‘seven tips’ for creating a strong and relevant agency in a consumer-sensitive environment include being relevant, being real, embracing “green” at the heart of the business, being creative and engaging, being differentiated, acting swiftly, and finally, giving people a clear role to play. Messer (2008) suggests that whilst it is difficult to identify one business model that will be ideal for an evolving industry environment, a number of basic strategies can be identified to help ensure an agency’s future:

- Adapt or die: Change to suit the evolving environment;
- Be accountable: Businesses that are accountable will thrive;
- Find your niche: Play to your strengths;

- Embrace your inner-geek: Foster integration of communication;
- Attract talent: Provide a work environment where creativity can flourish.

Managing director of research agency Heartbeat, Jem Wallis agrees that in the future no single business model will reign supreme. Businesses that are agile, accountable and creative will survive. Businesses that are inflexible, cumbersome and reluctant to embrace change will not. There will be a morphing of skill sets, making it difficult to confine any agency to a single model. “Advertising agencies will employ digital strategists, production companies will hire creatives and media agencies will create joint ventures with multiple disciplines to leverage their relationships with CEOs and CFOs to expand their professional offerings.” (Wallis, 2008).

It is apparent that within the last decade the advertising industry has experienced its greatest ever period of change. Industry consolidation, media fragmentation, the digital age, consumer power, and the split of the media and creative agencies have forever changed the industry landscape. For universities charged with the responsibility of training graduates for active participation in the industry, this situation presents a significant dilemma. Where does the university curriculum focus – strategy, media, creative - or does it in fact concentrate on preparing graduates to be multi-skilled and good advertising all-rounders? And is ‘digital’ the common ground for this preparation?

3. Who’s coming next?

Whilst the advance of technology, the influence it has, and the role it plays in marketing communication today is unprecedented, the industry itself remains as it always has been, driven by people. As David Ogilvy was once credited as saying in the 1960s: “The assets of my agency go down in the lift each evening at 5.00pm.” Arguably, nothing has changed, other than the fact that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to find and keep these ‘assets’.

Considering the velocity of change the industry is experiencing, rather than considering what’s coming next, perhaps we really should be focusing on **“who’s coming next”**.

“Today, many companies are reporting that their number one constraint on growth is their ability to hire workers with the necessary skills.”

Bill Clinton. Former President of the United States

Where is the next generation of advertising professionals coming from?

It is apparent from the literature and from industry dialogue that the skills crisis in advertising is in fact holding back the industry. It is seen to be a barrier to competitiveness and because the capability weakness is common at all levels of organisations, it presents a strategic risk for everything that business develops in the emerging digital channels (Advertising Skills Summit, 2008).

Buchan (2006) states that there is a burgeoning demand for multi-skilled candidates in marketing departments as well as advertising and media agencies. With the growth of the digital sector, it is important to have digital skills, regardless of the specific discipline one works in (Savage, 2006). Savage suggests that today it is all about staff retention. The 'war' for talent that Sorrell referred to is not simply about recruiting good talent, but also retaining them. Kelly (2007) suggests that all skills – from interactive, sales promotion, direct marketing to client service are in demand at junior (graduate) mid and senior levels, but that agencies need to invest more in training programs for staff. The dearth of good candidates means that retaining staff is critical. Kelly (2007) maintains that agencies need to concentrate on what they are doing to educate staff. Additionally, the shift in communication focus from traditional to digital communications sees the need by agencies to manage salary inflation and evolving client services from traditional creative to digital creative (Williams, 2008). At university level, this shift in emphasis places additional pressure on graduates to ensure that they have expertise in this area.

What do they need to know? And who is going to teach them?

The Universities and Beyond Report -UBR (2007) found that 95% of students felt it was important to have good training opportunities in their employment, to be conducting work that is challenging and interesting, and to have a work-life balance. Optimism and confidence in a bright future are the fundamental beliefs of today's university students. Work experience is seen as beneficial but, according to Coleman (2008), where graduates will benefit most is where they are exposed to employability skills in both their university course and in their employment later. A number of universities are recognizing this by incorporating concepts of work integrated learning, via constructs such as communities of practice and authentic problem-based learning (Brown et al, 1989; Lave and Wenger, 1991) into their curricula (McCulloch, 2007).

Patterson (2007) notes that today, most employers look for graduates of recognized university courses when hiring new staff. According to McCulloch (2007), because the industry is experiencing skill shortages, it recognizes the need for university graduates, young professionals who can be productive from day one. Referring to the situated learning environment of the on-campus student advertising agency at Charles Sturt University, McCulloch adds "When students leave CSU, they are more than graduating. They are leaving one agency and moving on to another. Hence, they are ready to literally hit the ground running." Lawrence (2007) supports this philosophy, suggesting that in terms of preparing students for professional practice, RMIT media and advertising courses "...teach exactly what the industry requires." Referring specifically to media proficiencies, Kerr (2007) suggests that it is no longer enough to produce graduates who can prepare awareness-raising media schedules. "Now we invite interaction. We have gone from the traditional media planning course to understanding media proliferation." (Kerr, 2007). Greet (2007) acknowledges the role universities play in the preparation of people with an understanding (of the media) and suggests that the real challenge is to retain them. "Really bright, smart and creative people have the world at their feet.

Keeping them in the market now is the challenge." (Greet, 2007). Williams (2008), in referring to what she calls the 'mushrooming growth' in the digital advertising space,

acknowledges that the industry is hard-pressed to adequately fill demand for experienced staff. Furthermore Williams cites the rapidly changing digital environment as demanding motivated and adaptable people who are ready to push boundaries. “That the biggest challenge for the advertising industry is the need for passionate and talented people.” (Williams, 2008).

Beyond university programs, the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA) conducts AdSchool which offers training in most disciplinary aspects of the industry. AdSchool is run by practicing advertising professionals and targets people who are currently working in the industry, generally in a junior position, looking to up-skill. The Media Federation of Australia (MFA) too provides internship and graduate training programs. Completing an on-the-job traineeship is seen by employers as essential in gaining an understanding of how the business works (Maloney, 2007). According to Carol Morris, executive officer of the Media Federation of Australia, MFA trainees are looked upon favourably as future staff members by agencies as a result of the training and support they receive during their time in media agencies (Morris, 2005).

Mitch Hoare, principal of an advertising specialist Sydney recruitment company believes that formal (university) qualifications make the difference. “Prospective employers want to see evidence of passion for the industry, and whether it’s a degree or some form of work experience, both go a long way to getting you to first base.” (Hoare, 2007).

4. Industry Investigation

Introduction

The advertising industry globally is experiencing an unprecedented shortage of skilled practitioners. As the literature identifies, this is compounded by the fact that the new generation of professionals entering the industry from universities and other training institutions, the so-called generation Y, has a completely different set of working criteria and life priorities to their predecessors.

As Morris (2005) states, it is evident that employers are seeking qualifications beyond the academic degree. They want hands-on skills, employees who are good communicators, team players and are dedicated to life-long learning. In the new digital world, it is apparent that they will also require employees who are digitally-savvy and will grow and prosper in the burgeoning digital communications environment (Williams, 2008).

Identification of themes

A key differential between this study and studies undertaken previously is the identification of industry insights as they relate to attributes sought by industry. These are based on the recognition of the significant changes that have taken place in recent years in terms of the evolving structure of the industry and the professional relationships between stakeholders within the industry. Key themes emerging from the literature and subsequent investigation include:

(i) The agency of the future: The evolving profile of the 'media' and 'creative' agency
An initial study by McCulloch (2007) identified that in recent years, what had previously been referred to as the 'full service' agency had split into two distinct entities: the media agency and the creative agency. Not only has this split created confusion in the market and competition between the two entities, it has created a diversity of graduate employment opportunities.

Secondary research indicates that in the short term there is unlikely to be any reconciliation between the two parties. If anything, the media agency is gaining strength at the expense of the creative agency. As a result, media agencies are struggling to recruit and to keep the numbers of appropriately skilled people they require.

(ii) The changing relationship between client and agency
The literature suggests that clients are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the contribution of the traditional full service 'one-stop' agency model, opting for an alternative that offers them access as required to more specialised skills, greater flexibility and better value for dollars invested. As a result of this, smaller, more versatile operations are emerging that, in some cases are acting as 'virtual agencies' to service a particular client's requirements. Additionally, services such as digital and online are being split off into smaller specialist agencies. Arguably, this new model may point to the development of the 'specialist' practitioner, rather than the generalist found in the more traditional agency staffing structures.

(iii) The influence of the digital media environment and the power of the consumer
Both formal research and the literature clearly indicate the growing influence of technology on day-to-day life and, specifically, in the way the marketers communicate and consumers receive information. This new digital communication environment not only moves the power base from marketer to consumer, it exposes a need for digitally-proficient professionals in the industry and highlights the current shortage of skilled communicators who can work effectively in the 2.0² environment.

(iv) The requirement by the academy to incorporate work integrated learning practices in the curricula
Industry surveys conducted by the Business Council of Australia highlight the stated requirement by business for universities to incorporate more professional training, or work integrated learning in their curricula, suggesting that hands-on experience provides the best transition to the workforce. This is supported by the published opinions of industry leaders, the implementation of graduate trainee programs by industry, and is further qualified by a number of studies undertaken by respected educators in Australia and internationally.

Primary Research Methodologies

Field research for the study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, with data collected during the period November 2007 to May 2008.

Qualitative research instruments included:

- (i) Depth interviews with international industry practitioners (4)
 - Advertising Consultant from Denmark:
 - Agency Procurement Director from the United Kingdom
 - Director of an Industry Body Training school in South Africa
 - Advertising Agency President in the United States

- (ii) Online recorded interviews with Australian industry practitioners (2)
 - Director of a Digital Advertising Agency
 - Manager of Business Services for Peak Industry Body

- (iii) Survey questionnaire of attendees at the 11th IAA World Education Conference in Washington DC (16)
 - Educators from Albania, Australia, Chile, Denmark, Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaysia, the Philippines, Romania, South Africa, United States, UAE.

Quantitative research instruments included:

- (iv) Online survey of AFA Accredited Advertising Agencies in Australia (17)
 - Survey questionnaire responses from 17 agencies

A. Qualitative research

The qualitative components of the research, specifically the depth interviews with practitioners utilizes a coded thematic analysis approach that is based on actual data gathered through a qualitative research approach, making it more reflective of the practical situations being investigated than speculative derived theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The reflective nature of this approach was particularly relevant, given my professional background in advertising and current involvement as both a practitioner and academic.

Additionally, the approach allowed me to act as an interpreter of the data, not just as a reporter or describer of the situation (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

Somekh & Lewin (2005) argue that concepts may be derived from multiple sources of qualitative data and that gathering data on the same topic is an accepted way of validating research findings. Daymon & Holloway (2002) note that in contemporary research it is common practice to include interviews, even though they are based on participants' accounts of events and points of view, rather than one's own observations and experiences. In the case of this study, data was gathered from a number of sources, including interviews. Daymon & Holloway (2002) suggest that not all qualitative research involves generating theory. Although the grounded theory approach is recognized as particularly appropriate for research in marketing communications, there were difficulties in operationalising a true grounded theory approach.

Additionally, it was felt that theoretical sampling was not required as the population for the study was easily identified and the sample could be selected in advance of data collection. Therefore, the approach taken was that of thematic analysis and coding, tracking back and forth between the evidence collected from the fieldwork and the literature, identifying

patterns in the data to help develop broader, central themes. In line with this approach, the following processes were followed in the capture, analysis and interpretation of the data:

Sampling

Selection of the appropriate sample of individuals from the population was made prior to data collection. This was a convenience sample comprising practitioners attending an international conference.

Coding and analysis of the data

The process of data analysis was a continual one throughout the entire program, from the beginning of the market investigation, and then throughout the literature review and interviews. Themes were identified and named, encoding the data into categories. The process commenced by *open coding*, breaking down and conceptualizing the data. Similar concepts and ideas were identified by labeling the data line by line in interview transcripts and cross-referencing to data identified in the literature.

The next step was to gather data together and reassemble under common headings and categories using the process of *axial coding*. By reviewing and re-sorting common themes, major groupings or categories were formed. As Daymon & Holloway (2002) identify, invariably a picture began to emerge that served to support my analysis.

The final step was the development of *core categories*, categories that integrated themselves to provide an overall picture or storyline. This process, also referred to as *selective coding*, clearly identified the concepts that were most significant to inform my final recommendations.

Sources of data

Daymon & Holloway (2002) suggest that data that are used may be both primary and secondary. Secondary data may include transcripts of existing documentation, relevant reports and the literature. Whilst the initial literature review was undertaken to consider the body of knowledge on the topic and to identify any gaps in the knowledge (and provide a reason to undertake the research study), the process employed of ‘cross-referencing’ the literature helped to confirm or refute categories discovered in my primary research.

Sources of data included:

- Review of the literature and specifically, current industry publications;
- Review of secondary research on the tertiary education sector;
- Formal discussions with international academic colleagues;
- Formal discussions with industry representatives;
- Depth interviews with international practitioners.

Ethical considerations

In line with the requirements of a researcher at Charles Sturt University, approval for the research was sought and received from the Ethics in Human Research Committee.

Depth interviews conducted with industry professionals were undertaken under the auspices of the CSU Ethics in Human Research Committee. Steps taken to establish the trustworthiness of the research included:

- An initial invitation was made to identified professionals within the industry to participate in an interview;
- Upon acceptance from the interviewees, a formal Information Statement was provided to them which clearly outlined the purpose of my research and advised them of the expected duration of the interview. Additionally, it informed interviewees of my intention to audio-record the interviews for transcription, confirmed all aspects of confidentiality and sought their formal agreement;
- Location of the interviews was in a place nominated as suitable by the participants;
- An example of question types was provided prior to the interview, and the style of questioning was open, and active listening was maximized throughout the interviews to validate my understanding of the participants' responses and to spring-board further questioning (Dayman & Holloway, 2002).

Research design

Prior to engaging in data collection, I conducted an initial literature review to narrow my field of investigation and to aid in the selection of a research methodology and eventual preparation of questions. I also conducted a thorough review of any existing (secondary) research that could inform my investigation, including formal research and previous conference and discussion papers.

Sampling procedure, recruitment and composition

Somekh & Lewin (2005) suggest that research design should take into account a number of important considerations, including access to people, the range of perspectives sought, ethics of data collection, and the analysis procedure. The decision to utilise a qualitative depth-interview methodology was based on two key factors. Firstly, access to international practitioners, and secondly I was seeking insights and expert opinion, not numerical substantiation.

My attendance at the largest bi-annual gathering of international marketing communication professional offered access to a cohort of international practitioners and afforded me the opportunity to conduct one-on-one interviews which I believed would provide the information I required.

A total of 6 depth interviews were conducted. The interview sample comprised top-level international advertising agency management and agency recruitment personnel.

The composition of the sample is detailed in Table 1 as follows:

POSITION	INDUSTRY TYPE	INTERVIEW TYPE
Managing Director DNCC Consulting, Denmark	Specialist advertising education consultancy	Recorded depth Interview (R1)
Managing Director and Principal AAA School of Advertising, South Africa	Advertising school	Recorded depth interview (R2)
Vice President Global Advertising Strategies, New York	Advertising agency	Recorded depth interview (R3)
Principal Idea Garden, Sydney	Digital agency	Online interview (O1)
Manager of Business Services Advertising Federation of Australia, Sydney	Peak industry representative body	Online interview (O1)
Chairman Agency Assessment International, United Kingdom	Agency procurement company	Recorded depth interview (R1)

Table 1: Interviews - sample composition

A question guide was developed to ensure that areas were consistently covered across all participants. Questions were initially piloted with one participant and then refined for use with future participants. Questions acted as a loose yet logical framework for eliciting response and prompted emerging concepts. Interviews lasted approximately 10 minutes. Interviews were audio-taped with participants' consent and were transcribed verbatim. Assurance was given that no interviewees would be identified.

Data Analysis

Taped interviews were transcribed and identified by participant type and date only. As Daymon & Holloway (2002) contend, coding provides the first step to developing categories, patterns and concepts. Hence, coding was used to reduce the verbatim interview data into major categories. Categories were identified, as were major themes identified in the literature. A process of open coding was used to break down the data into basic concepts. This facilitated the identification of important issues and prompted the emergence of themes.

Open coding was done as line-by-line notes then collected and compiled under themes as they emerged. Axial coding facilitated compilation under common themes and headings. Seven (7) key categories emerged from the literature:

- (vii) Skills shortage
- (viii) Professional training
- (ix) People skills
- (x) Consumer power
- (xi) Agency changes
- (xii) Digital environment
- (xiii) Education

11 specific categories emerged from the interviews, many obviously inter-related:

- (xi) Academic standards
- (xii) Digital knowledge
- (xiii) Staff employment
- (xiv) Consumer control
- (xv) Professional practice
- (xvi) Whole business landscape
- (xvii) Today's advertising
- (xviii) Agency structures
- (xix) Agency/Client relationships
- (xx) New thinking
- (xxi) Graduate requirements

Correlating the two sources of data:

From the Literature	From the Research
Skills shortage	Staff employment New thinking
Professional training	Professional practice
People skills	Graduate requirements
Agency changes	Whole business landscape Today's advertising Agency structures Agency/Client relationships
Consumer power	Consumer control
Digital environment	Digital knowledge
Education	Academic standards

Table 2: Correlation of categories from the data

Emerging Themes

From the data and categories three central themes covering a range of categories emerged from the data:

- A. Skills shortage
- B. Industry trends
- C. Graduate requirements

The themes and their supporting categories are outlined in the following Table 3:

Themes	Main Categories
A. Skills shortage	Craft skills Tenacity in finding new solutions Understanding of digital Specialists in e-commerce Strategic thinkers Willingness to work hard
B. Industry trends	Specialist agencies Digital integration Media/creative agency-divide Growth of media agency over creative Agency treated as 'supplier' Lack of faith in 'one-stop-shop'
C. Graduate requirements	Good communication skills Flair for Internet-based work Curiosity Fresh ideas Understanding of industry history Knowledge of methods and tools Significant professional practice

Table 3: Emerging themes and their categories

Key findings

(i) & (ii) Depth interviews and online practitioner interviews.

A. Skills shortage

The advertising industry globally is morphing into a new business cycle that is being driven by a combination of new technology and increasing consumer power. As a result, the industry is currently experiencing an unprecedented shortage of skilled practitioners. The advent of generation Y as the next generation of advertising professionals is adding additional pressure to the situation with the demands that this generation brings to the industry and to employers.

The biggest challenge facing the industry? Most definitely people. There are not enough people. The industry is growing much more rapidly than there are people to staff and fulfill that need.

Verbatim: O1

And that's the problem in agencies now – high turnover.

Verbatim: O2

The penetration and influence of new technologies, and in particular interactive consumer media referred to as Web 2.0², is challenging the very nature of communication and hence, the qualifications of the people who work in the industry. It is anticipated that, with the growth of technology and a consumer commitment to digital communication, that there will be an increasing demand for agencies and people with specific skills in this area.

Not all agency people are going to have to be digital performers, but I think everyone has to understand the impact of digital and why digital is so different.

Verbatim: R2

That was then. Now we've got NOW! Where do the digital geniuses come from? If we could answer that we'd solve problems for some of the very big go-go agencies in the world.

Verbatim: R1

It needs people who are passionate about digital. The digital process is quite different from a production perspective so it needs people who understand that process, but it also needs people who are passionate about this space so they need to be constantly looking and learning and re-inventing themselves.

Verbatim: O1

I think in the next few years there's going to be a lag. Between when these kids graduating recently become managers in regular agencies not in the digital agencies. So when we get through that lag in say 5 to 7 years...we can't even predict how this thing is going to mushroom.

Verbatim: R4

B. Industry trends

One model that has recently emerged is 'small is beautiful'. Inherently a strategic hub, it represents an alliance of smaller entities with specific skills and talents for the purpose of handling a client with specialist requirements. Wakes-Miller (2008) suggests that we can expect to see a proliferation of consultancies that embrace the 'hub' business model.

Clients are getting better and better, or more and more educated and they can do more and more of the work themselves. Many of the services they used to buy from agencies they just don't buy anymore. Either they do it in-house or they actually start dividing it up and having specialists in many areas so that they can coordinate the integration of their communication within their own organisation.

Verbatim: R1

Arguably the greatest single change to the marketing communications agency landscape in recent years has been the evolution of the specialist media agency and the resultant split of the traditional full service advertising agency into two distinct entities: the media agency and the creative agency. New consumer behaviour patterns, new technologies and new 'media-neutral' strategies to keep up with them both are seen to be driving a trend that is forcing media agencies to develop a stronger strategic leadership role with clients (Gauthier, 2007).

I think that clients often think that agency personnel are too limited in their scope. That they are very much 'above the line' and are not really up to date on the total communication platforms we have today.

Verbatim: R1

Upward (2008) maintains that media owners have never trusted agencies to sell their media as well as they could.

The amount of channels we have to connect between the company and the consumer that the agency is somehow still are tied to the fact that originally they were remunerated through some sort of agency commission from the media.

Verbatim: R1

C. Graduate requirements

For universities with programs in the advertising sector, the skills shortage means that currently there is no shortage of employment opportunities for graduates. However, the challenge is not simply to train graduates to 'fill jobs' but rather, to equip them with the skills that address the dynamic nature of the evolving industry.

They must have some knowledge of methods and tools and models they can work with. The problem is that they'll get a job and then as they'll get into a silo and work very deeply with one area when they get their first job. But you need to understand the total context of what you are doing..."

Verbatim: R1

I think that it is the responsibility of the universities and schools to provide a better quality graduate. A more rounded graduate. A graduate who can think strategically, that has the necessary knowledge and skills and it is our responsibility too to embrace the new technology and to make sure that we are at the forefront of that so that graduates can come in and actually help the agencies instead of getting there and saying "OK you'd better teach us."

Verbatim R3

I think the challenge is always there for people who run agencies to re-invest themselves with young people and I think that the issues that agencies have with young people has been timeless. They don't come out well prepared enough I think that we are always looking for people who are renaissance folks who really have a passion, a tenacity, an inquisitiveness to stand up and say "Hey! How about this?"

Verbatim: R4

It is apparent from the literature that the greater the cooperation between universities and employers, the greater the benefits to graduates. Constructs such as work integrated learning and authentic problem-based learning (McCulloch, 2007), as well as internships and work placements imbedded in course structures are now common in advertising degree courses.

I believe very much that it is a swing back and forth from theory to practice and practice to theory and sometimes the best theoretical learning or understandings you get is when you are faced with a practical problem and are presented with a model of theory that will actually solve your problem.”

Verbatim: R1

In the evolving new agency environment, should they be specialists or generalists?

You can't retrain old folks at this (digital). These kids who are graduating now are at the cutting edge of living it. I think that it is going to be awkward for a while...I think, you know, you are going to have the students mentoring the teachers.

Verbatim: R4

(iii) Survey of International Educators: IAA World Education Conference

The 11th IAA World in Education Conference in Washington DC in April 2008 entitled *Championing Marketing Communications Worldwide* took as its theme the concept of situated learning and the preparation of students for assimilation into professional practice. Much of the discussion and academic presentations centered on how practitioners from countries around the world are embracing the model of 'learning by doing' to effectively prepare their graduates for the velocity of change they will encounter in today's and tomorrow's marketing communication industry. The theme of the conference supports my own research into effective education and the alignment of graduate attributes with industry requirements. The fact that the conference was conducted by the International Advertising Association ensured an essential 'practitioner' perspective to what was largely an academic conference. The event provided an appropriate environment to survey the views of attending international academics.

Research design

A questionnaire comprising 5 'open ended' questions was distributed to attending academics. The questions were framed to elicit insights and beliefs rather than simply quantitative substantiation of pre-determined concepts. As with the depth interviews, the fact that I was attending the gathering of leading international academics in marketing communications suggested that a survey would provide the information required to support insights gained from the industry practitioner interviews.

Questions were framed to elicit points of view relating to:

- The development of student attributes: professional and personal

- Teaching strategies employed
- Teaching strategies relating to work integrated learning
- Graduate attributes required by industry: technical and personal
- Student internships

The survey was distributed to 15 attendees representing 10 universities; one advanced college and 4 ‘other’ tertiary institutions, with graduate qualifications encompassing PhD, Masters and bachelor degrees, as well as diplomas and advanced diplomas.

Responses

Responses in relation to the survey questions are shown here in order of the importance placed on them by respondents:

Q: As an educator, what key attributes do you seek to develop in your students?

Professional attributes -

- i. Critical thinking
- ii. Communication skills
- iii. Team work
- iv. Analytical skills
- v. Outstanding creative
- vi. Morality – ethics

Personal attributes -

- i. Hard worker – diligent
- ii. Morality – ethics
- iii. Capable of critical thinking
- iv. Effective communicator
- v. Integrity
- vi. Open-mindedness
- vii. Leadership
- viii. Initiative
- ix. Creativity
- x. Teamwork

Q: What core teaching strategies do you employ to develop these attributes?

- i. Case studies
- ii. Group projects
- iii. Workshops
- iv. Debates in teams on specific themes
- v. Real-world projects to compliment lectures
- vi. Classroom presentations
- vii. Hands-on activities

Q: What teaching and learning strategies, if any do you employ to introduce students to professional practice?

- i. Real life issues

- ii. Industry comes to class – guest speakers
- iii. Company projects
- iv. Students do case studies
- v. Internships

Q: In your experience, what are the core skills employees want in your graduates?

Technical -

- i. Written communication skills
- ii. Basic computer skills
- iii. Oral communication skills
- iv. Research capabilities
- v. Capable of thinking ‘outside the box’ – abstract reasoning
- vi. Critical thinking

Personal –

- i. Good work ethic
- ii. Communication skills
- iii. Flexibility – multi-skilled

Q: Do your students undertake compulsory industry internships?

Yes: 6 responses (40%)

No: 6 responses (40%)

N/A 3 responses (20%)

Where?

- i. Agencies, media agencies, marketing companies
- ii. Other associate companies

Key findings

Critical thinking, communication skills and team work are the key professional attributes. These are supported by personal attributes of hard work, ethical behaviour, an ability to think critically and to be an effective communicator. These would seem to support the findings of O’Keeffe (2008) and Reeves (2008) in that the universities need to refocus on ‘generic’ skills, as well as the views of Coleman (2008) in terms of the requirement for communication skills. However, the term ‘hard work’ may need to be further defined in light of the attitudes of generation Y, as identified in the literature. The concept of hard work as defined by the current industry population may be seen completely differently by generation Yin relation to their clearly expressed expectations of work and personal life.

Core teaching strategies employed include case studies, group projects, real world projects and workshops. These strategies would seem to support the finding of McCulloch (2007) that identified work integrated learning in an industry-professional environment (such as Kajulu Communications, the on-campus student advertising agency of Charles Sturt University) as a significant contributor to graduate practitioner skills and proficiencies, and acceptance by the industry in terms of employability.

Strategies employed to introduce students to professional practice include real-life issues / real client projects and industry guest speakers. These support the findings of McCulloch (2007) and opinions of industry (Brentnall, 2006; Maloney, 2007; Howcroft, 2007) in relation to the notion of situated learning and exposure to an industry-professional experience.

Core technical skills identified by employers include written and oral communication skills, as well as basic computer skills. This would seem to support the notion that communication skills are critical, as identified in the literature by Spence-Stone & Byrne (2004) and Coleman (2008). Whilst 'basic' computer skills are nominated, there is no mention of digital skills. This is interesting when one reflects on the literature and practitioner interviews in relation to the emphasis placed on digital skills by industry (Arnott, 2007; Stengel, 2008). This omission may indicate that the academy may not be totally in-tune with current industry requirements in terms of graduate skills in media and emerging media technologies. Curriculum may need to be reviewed to incorporate the teaching of these skills. Communication skills and a good work ethic are nominated as key personal skills. These support the findings of Coleman (2008).

Finally, internships are seen as important by just 40% of respondents. This is countered by 60% who indicate that internships are not a component of their curriculum. The LinkMe (2008) survey clearly indicated that employers found fault in the academy's ability to produce graduates with hands-on skills via programs such as work placement and internships. Curricula, certainly in Australia, should therefore consider the inclusion of an internship component to ensure that university graduates are appropriately prepared for the work place.

B. Quantitative research

Whilst the qualitative studies presented here address international practitioner and educator perspectives, it was considered important to overlay this international interpretation with an Australian perspective. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) argue that knowledge of the different research traditions enables one to adapt or adopt research design to cater for constraints such as availability of data, populations and time. As the research outcomes required were largely information-based, the researcher employed a quantitative survey strategy to the foundation of the questionnaire. However, considering the importance of allowing respondents to 'express their views', a number of open-ended questions were included. The survey sought to better understand the practices and attitudes to education and training in Australian agencies. The survey consisted of 6 closed-ended and 4 open-ended questions. Close-ended questions utilised a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with an Item Mean score to be determined and were mutually exclusive to avoid ambiguity and to ensure that the respondent 'circled' just one.

Sampling

The research program and questionnaire was developed with the support of the AFA and was emailed to 70 AFA accredited agencies, that is, agencies who have demonstrated a commitment to on-going professional training as part of the AFA Best Practices

Accreditation Program (AFA, 2008). Whilst the response rate of 18 agencies (26% of the sample population) may seem low, considering the spread of agencies and their commitment to professional development, as demonstrated by their involvement with the AFA, the findings may be deemed to be indicative of the industry sample at large.

Summary of findings

Key findings of the closed-ended questions:

Q: Approximately how much do you spend per person on training?

Less than \$5,000:	76.5%
\$5,000 to \$9,900:	23.5%
\$10,000 to \$19,900:	0%
\$20,000 and over:	0%

Q: Please rate the level of skills in your agency. 1 being Very Strong and 5 Very Weak

Digital	93.3% Very Strong / Strong
Strategic Planning	76.5 Very Strong / Strong
Client service	65% Very Strong / Strong
Management	53% Very Strong / Strong

Q: Where do you see the greatest need for skills growth or improvement in your agency? 1 being Very Important and 5 being Not Important.

Digital	93.3% Very Important / Important
Strategic Planning	76.4% Very Important / Important
Client Service	65% Very Important / Important
Management	64% Very Important / Important

Q: Please rate the importance of skills you would seek in a graduate. 1 being Very Important and 5 being Not Important.

Interpersonal skills	94% Very Important / Important
Communication skills	94% Very Important / Important
Accepting responsibility	88% Very Important / Important
Analytical thinking skills	65% Very Important / Important
Discipline-specific knowledge	41% Very Important / Important
Discipline-specific skills	37.5% Very Important / Important
Hands-on practical skills	41% Very Important / Important

Q: How important is knowledge in the digital area to your agency? 1 being Very Important and 5 being Not Important.

69% Very Important / Important

Key responses to open-ended questions:

Q: What processes do you employ to incentivise and retain staff?

A: Good working environment; Competitive salaries; Targets for performance; Social outings; Training programs.

Q: What specific digital skills would you seek in a university graduate?

A1: An understanding of what is going on in the general community across all age groups, embracing the new technologies available and demonstrating everyday uses of them. Web-based programming or other compatible skills. An ability to understand the new technologies and how they impact in the business world.

A2: Depends on the role: for media more important, and same for an art director aspirant. However as a graduate we would expect a general understanding of what is currently available and how it might be leveraged in a marketing and communications perspective, in theory at least.

Q: In your opinion, how could universities and education/training institutions work more closely with your industry in the development of graduate skills and knowledge?

A: More practical, less theory; Face-to-face discussions with agencies; Internships / work experience placements to get graduates working in a real environment; Mentoring schemes (Clemenger Graduate program) to expose students to all aspects of agency operations; Regular presentations by agency practitioners to university faculty/staff on industry developments;

I think that a number of uni staff is out of touch with what the industry really does today. The industry moves so fast, it is very hard to be up to date if you are not actively involved on a day to day basis.

(Response 10)

5. Conclusions and recommendations

A review of the marketing communication literature, both academic and industry-based clearly indicates that the industry is undergoing significant change, arguably the greatest period of change in recent times. Executive director of the International Advertising Association, Michael Lee suggests that the industry is being driven by a combination of new technologies and increasing consumer power, with arguably the greatest issue being the shortage of skilled talent (Lee, 2006). Sorrell (2008) maintains that the next battlefield in industry will be fought over people – people with proficiencies to tackle the dynamic changes that the industry is experiencing, with technology leading the charge of change.

The review of the literature and the primary research undertaken has identified three (3) broad themes: *the skills shortage*; *industry trends*; and *graduate requirements*. Specifically:

The skills shortage: Globally and specifically in Australia, the industry is experiencing an unprecedented shortage of adequately and appropriately trained practitioners. Core proficiencies nominated include superior communications and analytical skills and the ability to apply critical thinking to effective creative executions to a tech-savvy consumer. Specifically, there is a shortage of people who embrace digital technology and possess digital proficiencies. Rather than a threat, this situation should be seen as an opportunity for tertiary educators and industry training institutions to re-think curricula and develop programs that will prepare graduates for the realities of a dynamic marketing communication industry - programs that embrace both practitioner-specific skills and broader business and communication proficiencies.

However, there is some concern that universities and specifically, university staff may not be in touch with what is happening in the industry today.

Industry trends: Evolving communication trends are changing the very profile of the industry. The divide between media and creative agencies is at the forefront of these changes and shows no signs of abatement. Indeed, media agencies, it could be argued, are gaining the upper hand and the most influential seat around the client table. Client requirements too are altering the structure of agency providers. Smaller agencies are ‘punching above their weight’ and are succeeding in winning big client business, traditionally the domain of the large multi-national communication companies. The growing dominance of technology and the resultant fragmentation of communication channels are seeing clients turning to smaller specialist communication providers, rather than opting for the ‘one-stop-shop’, to provide greater flexibility and a perceived better return on investment. This is creating greater opportunities for new professionals with new skills to enter what was once a mainstream media-dominated industry. In turn, this is creating opportunities for the academy in terms contemporary skills development.

Graduate requirements: As a result of these changes, graduate proficiencies now need to meet the new industry demand. However both the industry and the broader business community are somewhat disillusioned with both the quality of universities graduates and their abilities to assimilate easily into the work environment. There is criticism of the university sector and its ability to effectively train graduates to operate outside the classroom. As a result, peak industry bodies such as the AFA are adopting strategies and implementing formal programs to train new practitioners, early career workers, in the practicalities of the industry. Additionally, generation Y is apply new pressures to employers, demanding both a quality of professional and personal life that the now retiring baby-boomer generations never even considered. They know what they want, and they are not afraid to ask for it” (Brent all, 2006).

As it is for the industry, universities too are experiencing a significant change, and to paraphrase Lee (2006), are morphing into a new education cycle. Whilst retaining essential pedagogical standards, more and more the university education training model must be one of work integrated learning and the identification and alignment of graduate proficiencies to meet the demands of tomorrow’s marketing communication industry.

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