Prism, KickApps and Bentley University:
An Innovative Case of Synergistic Learning and Development between
Venture Capital, Startup and University

A Submission For:
EFMD Excellence in Practice Award 2010

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Word count: 3983
(excluding table of contents, references and appendices)
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Prism, KickApps and Bentley University: An Innovative Case of Synergistic Learning and Development between Venture Capital, Startup and University

Abstract
Most business-university learning and development initiatives involve two partners: one providing the business problem, the other providing a knowledge intensive solution. While this works well for established companies, a critical piece is missing for startups: venture capital. In this case we document the synergistic interaction between university (Bentley), startup (KickApps) and venture capital (Prism) as illustrated in Figure 1. While more complex than the traditional two-way model, it breaks new ground and offers important learning and development benefits from both a managerial and academic perspective.
Introduction: Partners & Importance

**The Partners in the L&D initiative**
The partners in this three-way learning and development (henceforth L&D) initiative were:

- Prism a highly successful Venture Capital (VC) firm\(^1\) ([http://prismventure.com](http://prismventure.com)) which has a portfolio of social media companies.
- KickApps ([www.kickapps.com](http://www.kickapps.com)) a social media startup specializing in providing social networks solutions\(^2\).
- And Bentley University ([www.bentley.edu](http://www.bentley.edu)) a pioneer in the intersection of marketing and technology with its Center for Marketing Technology ([www.bentley.edu/CMT](http://www.bentley.edu/CMT)) and its long time corporate partner Microsoft ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)). With these resources Bentley has been developing corporate immersion programs for over a decade.

**The Importance of the Focal Topic for the L&D initiative**
From a L&D perspective the focus of each partner has significant economic and social importance.

- Venture Capital backed companies account for 12 million U.S. jobs and 21 percent of U.S. GDP ([http://www.nvca.org](http://www.nvca.org)). Indeed, venture startups account for most of the growth in employment at any one time; indeed without startups, employment growth would be negative ([http://www.inc.com/news/articles/2009/02/startups.html](http://www.inc.com/news/articles/2009/02/startups.html)). Moreover, startups tend to be more entrepreneurial and innovative than established firms.
- Social networking, enabling platforms (such as KickApps, YouTube and Facebook) and associated media (video, pictures, texts, programs etc.), have become the primary driver of online activity, shifting marketing power away from

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\(^1\) Woody Benson of Prism, Top 100 VC’s of 2009 [http://alwaysongoin.com/permalink/post/34032](http://alwaysongoin.com/permalink/post/34032)

\(^2\) A vertical market is a group of similar businesses and customers that engage in trade based on specific and specialized needs. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vertical_market](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vertical_market))
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traditional corporations (cf. Berthon, Pitt and Campbell, 2008) and blurring the division between producers and consumers (cf. Berthon, Pitt, McCarthy, and Kates, 2007). Indeed the Economist recently commissioned and published as special report on the importance of the phenomenon for both business and society (Giles, 2010).

- Finally, as students take MBAs at an ever younger age, often directly after their undergraduate degree, there is growing awareness that the traditional MBA course with its emphasis on theory and case studies produce managers with a lack of real-world problem experience (cf. Heskett, 2003; Gosling and Mintzberg, 2004; Green, 2009). Corporate immersion courses are perhaps one solution to this problem.
Section One - The Challenge

Needs of Each Partner
Three friends sat drinking cold beers, overlooking the Charles River in Boston. Each had a different set of problems they were mulling over. Woody Benson, a partner in Prism Venture Capital explained “the problem with VC is you have to wear two very different hats: the first is the nurturing and enthusiast hat, the other the cold financial one; if one gets too close, too emotional involved in a start up you can lose your shirt; keep your distance and the firm dies like a flower in the desert.” Alex Blum, CEO, KickApps had other worries: “How can I get fast, actionable market research when we don’t have the budget or the expertise? This information is critical for the strategic direction of my company.” Finally, Perry Lowe of Bentley University lamented “I run a MBA corporate immersion class: I need firms who can both help the student learn about business and provide them with real world problems to solve – too often you get one without the other.” By the end of the evening they were on the way to devising a mutually beneficial solution. Subsequently, a working group was convened comprising Woody, Alex, Perry, and Pierre Berthon, another Professor at Bentley University. Over the following nine month period an innovative L&D initiative was conceptualized and implemented.

Value that Each Partner Provides
It was agreed that Woody would provide Perry’s MBA students with insight into the working of venture capital and specifically the funding of startups in the social media space. In return, the Perry’s student would provide a fresh perspective on KickApps, one of the startups that Woody was funding – both in terms of short and long term strategic direction. Alex of KickApps would provide the specific business challenge to Perry’s students, along with access to management and company information. In return the students would provide the market research that Alex desperately needed for his strategic plan. Finally the changes brought about by the information that the students provided to Woody and Alex would influence their ongoing interaction in terms of
capital, guidance and return-on-investment. The needs of- and value provided by- each of the partners is summarized in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Partner Needs and Value Provided**

![Diagram showing the relationship between partners and their needs and value provided.]

**Specific Challenge for the MBA Students**

KickApps is a first to market social media solution which enables the creation of highly engaging websites and online communities with a social network, branded and customized online video players, photo & video sharing capabilities, blogs, podcasts, message boards and widgets (see [www.kickapps.com](http://www.kickapps.com) for demonstration video). Combined with programming, marketing and promotion, these websites become destinations where companies can engage directly with customers and partners.

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3 Selected by Business Week as Best of the Web 2008

[http://images.businessweek.com/ss/08/09/0929_loved_websites/18.htm](http://images.businessweek.com/ss/08/09/0929_loved_websites/18.htm)
KickApps early stage customers were entertainment, media, and sports companies, but the CEO Alex Blum faced the strategic challenge of how to profitably grow the company beyond its initial niches.

Thus, Perry’s MBA corporate immersion class was issued with the following specific challenge:

- To research and segment the social media market and recommend whether KickApps should enter the SMB\(^4\), Enterprise\(^5\) market or both – and in which order of priority given the company’s current management, working capital, profitability, and three year time horizon.

The class comprised 35 multicultural and multifunctional students. To encourage diversity of recommendation, engender a competitive spirit, and minimize the problem of free-riding the class was divided into seven, independent teams. Each group would submit separate reports.

\(^4\) SMB = Small and medium businesses (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_and_medium_enterprises)

\(^5\) Enterprise = Large business
**Ownership of the business challenge & involvement of other stakeholders**

The students of MK755 took primary ownership of the *specific* business challenge. However Woody of Prism, Alex of KickApps and Perry of Bentley took personal ownership of the wider three-way interaction between the partners. Given the obvious issues of *confidentiality* and *consequentiality*, and to ensure ownership on part of the students, a number of steps were taken:

- At the start of the project, all students signed a KickApps Confidentiality Agreement and a Bentley Video Release Form.
- Individuals and Groups were held to the strictest standards of the Bentley Honor Code\(^6\). It was made clear that transgressions may result in either the filing of an Academic Incident Report or a more severe action at the discretion of the company.
- The class was divided into groups of three to four students for the second assignment and submitted all subsequent deliverables on a group basis.
- All group members conduct individual peer-group evaluations at the completion of each assignment.
- Students were informed that any absences from classes, group meetings, or unsatisfactory contribution to group assignments may (at the sole discretion of KickApps, Prism, or the instructor) lead to the removal of individuals from their group or the class.
- And of course, grades were directly linked to performance – as evaluated by management from Prism, KickApps and the course instructor.

In addition to the management team of Prism and KickApps, the initiative was underpinned by three important stakeholders, who had supported corporate immersion programs in the past. The first was Bentley University’s Center for Marketing Technology, headed by its Director Ian Cross, the second was Bentley’s main corporate

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\(^6\) Bentley honor code: [http://www.bentley.edu/ugcatalogue/honesty/honor_code.cfm](http://www.bentley.edu/ugcatalogue/honesty/honor_code.cfm)
Prism, KickApps and Bentley University: An Innovative Case of Synergistic Learning and Development between Venture Capital, Start-up and University partners, Microsoft, headed by its Chief Academic Evangelist Philip DesAutels; the third was a diverse group of local business leaders, industry analysts, thought leaders, and authors. The Center for Marketing Technology provided the students with focus group labs and an extensive set of market databases for research. Microsoft provided collaborative and analytical software for the groups to work virtually, reducing the need for excessive travel. Finally, a group of authors, leaders and experts from the wider business community was enlisted as guest speakers, a full list of which can be found in Appendix 1. Figure 3 summarizes the partners and support stakeholders.

Figure 3: Partners and Support Stakeholders
**Link with corporate strategy**

Given that KickApps is a startup, the L&D initiative had a major impact on corporate strategy. The deliverables were to prioritize KickApps growth strategy for 2010, and explore alternative strategic options for the longer term.

**The desired impact of the L&D initiative**

The project deliverables would provide KickApps with a 2010 Marketing Plan (including tactics) which would identify the optimum risk/reward options for immediate implementation. For the MBA students the projects would provide a firsthand experience of the workings of venture capital, startups and consulting. For Prism, the initiative would provide an independent perspective on KickApps and its future direction and viability.
Section Two – The Commitment

**Translating the brief into an actionable project**

The project was built around a 14 week, one semester course run at Bentley University from September through to December 2009. The class met formally once a week, on Thursday evenings. Independent and group work was conducted outside the class. The project was broken down into four discrete assignments which were logically cumulative in nature.

Given the sensitive nature of the assignment (social media market is a highly competitive, fast growing, multi-billion dollar industry) certain legal issues needed to be resolved. Consequently, all project participants signed Non Disclosure Agreements. This enabled KickApps to provide confidential information on the company’s operations. This included historical and current operating information, selected parts of monthly Board Meeting reports, and weekly meetings of the management team. This “Perpetual Value” approach enabled the project deliverables to work within current company constraints like working capital, management capacity and monthly operating budgets.

Woody of Prism and Alex of KickApps also made formal commitments to meet with the students on a regular basis – generally during scheduled classes. The finalized agreement, including deliverables, dates, and responsibilities were encapsulated in the course syllabus (See Appendix 2), to which all parties agreed to abide.

**Financial parameters of the L&D initiative**

Project work was conducted by Bentley University without cost to KickApps with the exception of their management time. All four key members of the KickApps management team\(^7\) travelled to Boston at least once during the project and were able to

\(^7\) Alex Blum, CEO, David Lapter, CFO, Mike Sommers, SVP, Product Management, Michael Chin, SVP, Marketing.
participate in every weekly class through the use of Microsoft Live Meeting and RoundTable\textsuperscript{8}. Prism’s Woody Benson attended every class in person.

**How the commitment of all stakeholders was guaranteed**
Commitment from all stakeholders was achieved by a four-step screening process. The first step was a preliminary meeting between Bentley and Prism to conduct a KickApps Needs Analysis in order to determine the project scope and assure the availability of sufficient Bentley resources. This increased the probability for a successful outcome. The second step was to assure that at least one member of KickApps and Prism management would attend every weekly class. This guaranteed that the ongoing work would be “on target,” reflected any corporate changes during the engagement, and increased the probability that the deliverables would be implemented. The third step was an Interpersonal Analysis to evaluate the interaction potential between Prism, KickApps, and the Bentley University students. Previous experience had shown a direct correlation between company involvement and the quality of student effort. The fourth step was a Corporate Partner Relationship Evaluation to determine that there was potential for a long term mutually beneficial relationship. This included student internship and job opportunities, future projects, and the fit between the company mission and Bentley University mission.

\begin{footnote}
Provision and support was supplied free of charge by Microsoft, a long time partner of Bentley University.
\end{footnote}
The agreed timeline and major milestones.

The project schedule, including timeline and milestones was based around the standard Bentley semester. The project was divided into four modules, each with an associated assignment. These are listed below, and the timeline and milestones are summarized in Figure 4.

Module One: Individual Assessment of Social Media Market
   Assignment 1: Market Analysis and Segmentation of Social Media Applications
Module Two: Group Analysis of SMB Social Media Market
   Assignment 2: Analysis and Marketing Plan for KickApps SMB Market
Module Three: Group Analysis of Enterprise Social Media Market
   Assignment 3: Analysis and Marketing Plan for KickApps Enterprise Market
Module Four: Group Analysis of Future Social Media Market
   Assignment 4: Disruptive Changes in Social Media

Figure 4: Timeline and Milestones
Section Three – The L&D Initiative

The learning and/or development objectives
The L&D objectives for the MBA students were split into general course objectives and specific project objectives. In turn the project objectives were broken down into the four assignments/deliverables mentioned in the timeline and milestones section above. The objectives are now described in greater detail.

General Course Objectives:
- To understand the workings of venture capital
- To understand the challenges and opportunities of startups
- To develop experience developing market plans and strategy in a real world context

Specific Project Objective:
- The project goal is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the KickApps business model and how it relates to the various macro and micro-worlds of social media solutions in 2010-2013. The four assignments and their objectives can be found in detail in the course syllabus (see Appendix 2). The logic of how the assignments fit together is provided by Figure 5. A sample assignment is shown in Exhibit 1.

Assignment 1
  Objective: to understand the business & market
Assignment 2
  Objective: to research and analyze the SMB market
Assignment 3
  Objective: to research and analyze the Enterprise market
Assignment 4
  Objective: to (re)vision the business
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Figure 5: Logic of the Assignments

Exhibit 1: Detailed Objective for Assignment 4

The objective of Assignment Four is to take your cumulative understanding of KickApps, its customers, and its consumers, and design a visionary strategic direction for the company. This will require that you use inductive rather than deductive reasoning and create a disruptive change in social media. Assignment Four is not about incremental growth and much more than a brainstorming assignment. Since there is no correct answer, the best deliverables will have to include both innovative thinking and supporting analysis. Feel free to conduct whatever research you’d like for Assignment Four. You should talk with as many thought leaders as you can or conduct whatever primary or secondary research necessary.
The learning methods

A diverse range of learning methods was employed, as research suggests that different students have different learning styles (e.g. Kolb, 1984). The methods included:

- Assigned readings
- Formal lectures
- Guest speakers
- Open discussions with managers, thought leaders, and entrepreneurs
- Individual and group work
- Written assignments
- Oral presentations
- The “Pitch”
- Use of the focal product: KickApps Social Media Solution

Of these methods, two standout in terms of innovation: First, an important and novel element of the learning method was “The Pitch”; here students and/or student teams had an intense 10 minutes to convey their insights and recommendations to the management of KickApps and Prism. During these pitches management would interrupt and ask questions; this led to a loss of control by the students in order to accommodate management’s agenda rather than their own. This forced the students to think on their feet and defend their ideas extemporaneously. This was designed to give students real world experience of conveying ideas and information in a succinct and compelling manner in business situations over which they may not have unilateral control.

Second, the students built and operated their own KickApps site (see Appendix 3 for screen shots of the KickApps site created). This had three functions: first it enabled participants to gain hands-on experience of the focal product; second, the KickApps social media platform was used by students to build a sense of community amongst themselves and with their instructors; and third to provide dynamic feedback on the
learning process to Woody, Alex, and Perry. Sample feedback is included in Appendix 4. A collage of images appears in Exhibit 1 below.

Exhibit 2: Collage of the Students’ KickApps Site

![Collage of the Students’ KickApps Site](image)

Learning environment

The learning environment was enacted by three elements:

- The instructors and support staff;
- The grading rubric which encouraged certain behaviors; and
- The physical and technological infrastructure

The instructor and support staff engendered an enthusiastic and supportive atmosphere. Perry met with students most weekdays during office hours to discuss problems, advise and encourage. The grading rubric emphasized attendance and
participation, contribution to group work, and the importance of oral presentations\textsuperscript{9}. Details can be found in the course syllabus (Appendix 2). The physical and technological infrastructure included the Center for Marketing Technology classroom, a classic horse-shoe teaching room, equipped with networked computers, printers, and projectors, as well as group break-out rooms fitted with high definition video conferencing facilities and access to leading market databases. To minimize travel and maximize management participation, students communicated with KickApps management in New York, other corporate partners, and geographically distant guest speakers and industry experts using Microsoft Live Meeting with RoundTable. Groups outside of class time conducted group meetings also using the previously mentioned technologies.

**Progress indicators and learning measurement**

Feedback on progress was provided to students and groups verbally at each class meeting. Formal written assessment of progress was provided one week after the submission of each of the four assignments. All assignments were evaluated by the three partners: Woody for Prism, Alex for KickApps and Perry for Bentley. Clear guidelines were provided for each assignment, including the subdivision of marks. For example the grading for Assignment 4 is show in Exhibit 3. The breakdown for all assignments can be found in the course syllabus (Appendix 2).

**Exhibit 3: Grading Breakdown for Assignment 4**

The grading for Assignment Four will be based on understanding the specific visionary positions of current industry leaders (25%), developing a truly innovative strategy for the company (25%), providing sufficient supporting facts/analysis/rationale to assure that your strategy is implementable (25%), and providing specific projections that KickApps could achieve if they followed your recommendation (25%).

\textsuperscript{9} The increasing grade emphasis on oral communications is reflective of the need articulated again and again by recruiters for graduates to be able to provide brief and compelling verbal recommendations in the workplace. (e.g. Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997)
How the roles were distributed and aligned

The course was co-created by the three partners and the role of each was in line with the value that each partner provided (see section “Value that Each Partner Provides”). Moreover, each of the assignments was jointly created. Evaluation was shared but with a different emphasis of perspective appropriate for each partner. In general Bentley was responsible for administration and formal teaching, whilst Prism and KickApps provided the focal problem, managerial expertise and access to information. Weekly meetings keep the partners synchronized with respect to expectations and progress.
Section Four – The Impact

Impact can be broken down into three parts: indicators, actual changes and final impact. These were operationalized sequentially in term of perception, behavior and attitude (cf. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The indicators of impact were the perceived quality of the assignments as assessed by management of Prism and KickApps; quality was assessed in terms of actionability, affordability, and authenticity (originality), and in terms of the knowledge insights offered. Actual changes were operationalized as behavioral impact – the specific new behaviors and procedures which resulted from the changes in perception and knowledge. The final impact was operationalized in term of attitudinal changes which came about as a result of the perceptual and behavioral changes. These attitudinal changes are in essence strategic intentions that drive future behaviors. The perceptual, behavioral and attitudinal impacts for both KickApps and Prism are summarized in Exhibit 4, and are now described briefly in turn.

Exhibit 4: Perceptual, Behavioral & Attitudinal Impacts of the Initiative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Actual Changes</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptual Impact: resulting from the L&amp;D initiative</td>
<td>Behavioral impact: resulting from change in perception and knowledge</td>
<td>Attitudinal impact: Strategic intention which drive longer-term behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KickApps</td>
<td>RESEARCH on Social Media Market Perceived quality of market research; quality of recommendations; quality of strategic vision (actionable? affordable? authentic/original?) Knowledge insights: better understanding of the market, different segments, competition, and competitive options</td>
<td>Changes in Strategy People: change in management Product: redesign of products Pricing: changes in pricing Place: changes in competitive positioning, utilization of new channels Exploitation of new market opportunities</td>
<td>Clarity and commitment to new strategic direction Enhanced management cohesion Commitment to an ongoing relationship with Bentley University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prism VC</td>
<td>PERSPECTIVE on KickApps &amp; Market Perceived quality and diversity of different perspectives on focal organization, its market, future strategic options and potential Knowledge insights: enhanced investor insight into KickApp executives “out of the board room” Different investment options and strategies available for Prism</td>
<td>Increased investment in KickApps Search instigated for a technical partner for KickApps Rethinking of capital consumption &amp; exit opportunities Implementation by other Prism backed startups of unique “go to market” strategies for the social self-serve segment</td>
<td>Enhanced commitment to KickApps in particular and the Social Media market in general Commitment to an ongoing relationship with Bentley University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceptual Impact
Recall from Figure 2 (Partner Needs and Value Provided) that at the outset of the L&D initiative that KickApps needed fast actionable market research and Prism need different perspectives on KickApps and the Social Media market. Thus the perceptual impact for KickApps was the quality of the market research, recommendations and the strategic vision provided by the students in the four assignments. Management rated each as high and felt that they had gained a far deeper understanding of the market, different segments, the competition, and competitive options.

Similarly, Prism’s management was delighted by the quality and diversity of different perspectives on KickApps, its market, future strategic options and potential. Indeed four to seven innovative ideas were forthcoming. In addition management gained awareness of different investment options and strategies available for Prism. Finally, the L&D initiated provided an unexpected bonus: enhanced insight into KickApps executives “out of the board room”. Simply Prism’s management gained a far deeper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the KickApps management team.

Behavioral Impact
As a result of the change in perceptions from the knowledge gained by the L&D initiative, a number of far-reaching changes were made at both KickApps and Prism. For KickApps this culminated in a significant revision of their business strategy. Perhaps the most difficult change on the personnel side was the firing of the CMO\(^{10}\), as it was realized the individual concerned did not have the requisite knowledge or experience to enact the revised strategy. The new strategy included a redesign of the product portfolio, changes in pricing, in competitive positioning, and the utilization of new channels of delivery. Finally, new market opportunities were exploited.

\(^{10}\) Chief Marketing Officer
For Prism, the top-line impact of the L&D initiative was increased investment in KickApps. Other changes included the search and engagement of various collaboration partners for KickApps; these included Microsoft’ SharePoint (http://sharepoint.microsoft.com), Telligent (http://telligent.com), Salesforce.com (www.salesforce.com) and Amazon (www.amazon.com). In addition there was a rethinking of capital consumption and exit opportunities. Finally, Prism was able to transfer the insights from the L&D initiative to other Prism backed startups; one prominent example was the implementation by other startups of unique “go to market” strategies for the social self-serve market.

**Attitudinal Impact**

The perceptual and behavioral changes brought about by the L&D initiative resulted in attitudinal changes that articulate as strategic intentions that drive longer term behaviors. For KickApps management this resulted in greater clarity and commitment to the new strategic direction; moreover the process resulted in enhanced management cohesion. Finally, due to the success of the L&D initiative there was a commitment to an ongoing relationship with Bentley University. For Prism’s management there has been enhanced commitment to KickApps in particular and the Social Media market in general. Moreover the success of the L&D initiative alos led Prism to commit to an ongoing relationship with Bentley.
**Conclusion**

Three friends sat drinking cold beers, overlooking the Charles River in Boston. Each had a different reason to be happy with the Prism-KickApps-Bentley L&D partnership. Woody of Prism opined “amazing how those students managed to see things that I, with 20 years experience in the business, missed; just shows that experience can blind as well as illuminate.” Alex, CEO, KickApps had other things to celebrate: “the market research the students provided has lead to a significant strategic expansion.” Finally, Perry Lowe of Bentley University enthused “the students learnt – by theory and practice.” By the end of the evening they had agreed to extend the partnership.

**Postscript**

Indeed, as of January 2010, Prism and Bentley are preparing further corporate immersion programs using other Prism-backed startups as focal organizations. Moreover, as of February 1, 2010, the SETS (Student Evaluation of Teaching) for the corporate immersion class MK755 became available. The participating students gave the course an average overall score of 4.91 (on a 5 point scale). Finally, a video of Woody Benson reflecting on the initiative can be found at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w436kgo3oeY
References


Appendix 1: List of Guest Speakers and Dates

"Digital Media Investment Strategy"
Woody Benson, General Partner, Prism VentureWorks
Sep 10, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Social Media - Transforming the Way We Do Business"
Rick Faulk, co-author of "Barack, Inc. Winning Business Lessons of the Obama Campaign"
Sep 17, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Focus on MEAT - The Conflux of Media, Entertainment, And Technology"
Santo Politi, Founder and General Partner, Spark Capital, Boston, Massachusetts
Sep 24, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"A Social Media Operating System and A Suite of Applications That Plug Into It"
Alex Blum, Chief Executive Officer, KickApps Corporation, New York, NY
Sep 24, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Reinvent Your Website"
David Lapter, Chief Financial Officer, KickApps Corporation, New York, N.Y.
Oct 8, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Communities and Groundswell Opportunities"
Josh Bernoff, Senior Vice-President, Forrester Research, Cambridge, Massachusetts and co-author of Groundswell - Winning in a World Transformed By Social Technologies
Oct 15, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"SEO Does Not Stand Alone"
Doug Mow, Chief Marketing Officer, Virtusa Corporation, Westborough, Massachusetts
Oct 15, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Social Software on Demand"
Michael Chin, Senior Vice-President Marketing, KickApps Corporation, New York, N.Y.
Oct 15, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Solutions For Web Publishers"
Michael Sommers, Senior Vice-President Product Development, KickApps Corporation, New York, N.Y.
Oct 29, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Disruptive New-Age Business Accelerators"
John Landry, Founder and Managing Director, Lead Dog Ventures, Wayland, Massachusetts
Nov 5, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Social Media and The Enterprise Market"
Eric Alterman, Chairman and Founder, KickApps Corporation, New York, N.Y.
Nov 5, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Enterprise 2.0 Technology and Collaboration Tools"
Yoshi Maisami, Co-Founder and Senior Partner, Intridea, Inc., Washington, D.C.
Nov 12, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm

"Information Technology and Services"
John Gallant, Chief Content Officer, IDG Enterprise, Executive Vice-President and General Manager CXO/Network World, Chief Executive Officer and Publisher of Network World, Boston, Massachusetts
Nov 19, 2009 7:30-9:50 pm
Appendix 2: Course Syllabus

Bentley University
Marketing Department

MK-755-100 Fall 2009  Professor Philip M. Lowe
Marketing Project  Morison 242
Class Meetings: Thursday Evenings (7:30-9:50pm)  Tel: 781-891-3139
Classroom: Center for Marketing Technology (CMT)  Email: plowe@bentley.edu
Office Hours: Before Class on Thursday evenings and by appointment

Prerequisite: BF-504 or equivalent

Course Description:
Focuses on the design, development and execution of a marketing project as part of a marketing plan. Studies management issues in implementing marketing plans and activities. Examines how specific projects relate to an organization’s overall marketing strategy and the resources needed to implement such activities. Discusses criteria used to measure effectiveness of specific marketing activities.

General Course Objectives:

• To understand the workings of venture capital
• To understand the challenges and opportunities of start-ups
• To develop experience developing market plans and strategy in a real world context

Project Description:
The project goal is to develop a very comprehensive understanding of the KickApps business model and how it relates to the various macro and micro-worlds of social media solutions in 2010-2013.

Company Overview:
Selected by Business Week readers as Best of the Web 2008, KickApps provides brands, enterprises and web publishers with solutions that enable social, interactive, dynamic, distributed and data-informed web experiences. KickApps solutions consist of a suite of hosted social and media applications and services that are used by some of the world’s largest websites and brands to grow & engage their online audiences and foster deeper relationships with customers. Clients include: Budget Travel, CW Television, Guinness World Records, Special Olympics, HBO, Cinemax, Cox Television, the Phoenix Suns, the New York Knicks, the New York Rangers and thousands of other sites. For more information, visit www.kickapps.com and www.kickdeveloper.com.

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Recent Company Activity:
KickApps, the industry’s first complete Social Media publishing solution, exceeded its aggressive goals and expectations for all business metrics during the first half of 2009. During this period, KickApps saw more than a doubling in recurring revenues from its hosted services (hosted page views, widget renders, video plays and API calls) as compared to the same period in 2008. Additionally, the company added over 25,000 new clients during this period, nearly 40 percent of which are non-U.S. based organizations, including some of the world’s most recognizable brands in media, entertainment, the Fortune 500, and small business.


Consistent with KickApps’ belief that robust social media solutions shouldn’t be solely for major media, entertainment, and Fortune 500, KickApps launched new offerings tailored specifically for the needs of small businesses. Small businesses are rapidly adopting the KickApps platform to help transform their operations to benefit from the social web. The new offerings put complete control of the entire KickApps social media solution in the hands of any small business, independent web publisher and agency, and nonprofit organization. “The demand for our products and services has never been stronger and we’ve seen an accelerated adoption from businesses of all sizes that are looking to KickApps to achieve deeper levels of engagement with, and insight into, their audience, customers and partners,” said Alex Blum, CEO, KickApps. “In a very short period of time, we’ve evolved this industry from where social media was a mere bolt-on to an existing web site experience to it being baseline functionality and one of the most effective and efficient ways in which to grow audience, and develop new revenue streams and online marketing channels. Customers are increasingly using KickApps as the 100 percent solution for their web site, helping to define the next generation Web Publishing Experience as Social, Interactive, Data Informed and Distributed.”

KickApps was also recognized as a Strong Performer in the Forrester Wave™: Community Platforms, Q1 2009. Additionally, KickApps received a very high ranking in GigaOM Pro’s report on Social Media in the Enterprise, noting that KickApps is one of the top Social Software companies with strategic potential for the Enterprise.

During the first half of the year, the company released hundreds of new features that enable deeper levels of engagement on websites leveraging the KickApps Platform. A major initiative included KickApps’ collaboration with Adobe on the Open Source Media Framework initiative.
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A new open framework for building custom media players and an industry standard for media players. Integrated into the KickApps App Studio (the first truly drag-and-drop flash widget and video player authoring tool) for creating widgets and media players, the Framework enables the company to more quickly and easily integrate new production-ready components and significantly reduce time to market for clients. Entering the second half of 2009, KickApps will continue to expand its solutions for web publishers, media and entertainment companies, Fortune 500 brands and small businesses. A particular focus is providing the enterprise and corporate markets with solutions for customer engagement and insights, brand and product marketing, customer support and product research and development.

Special Note:  
A high degree of flexibility, initiative, and confidentiality will be expected. All students will sign a KickApps Confidentiality Agreement and Bentley Video Release Form at the beginning of the first class. Individuals and Groups will be held to the strictest standards of the Bentley Honor Code. Transgressions may result in either the filing of an Academic Incident Report or a more severe action at the discretion of the company. The class will divide into groups of three to four students for the second assignment and will submit all deliverables on a group basis during the remainder of the semester. All group members will conduct individual peer group evaluations at the completion of each assignment. Any absences from classes, group meetings, or unsatisfactory contribution to group assignments may (at the sole discretion of KickApps, PrismVenture, Microsoft Corporation, or the instructor) lead to the removal of individual students from their group or the class.

Technology:  
Students enrolled in the course will communicate with KickApps management in New York, other corporate partners, and geographically distant guest speakers and industry experts using Skype, Microsoft Live Meeting with RoundTable, and HD Videoconferencing. Groups outside of class time can conduct group meetings at their own discretion using any of the previously mentioned technologies.

Key Company Contacts:  
Prism Venture Partners,  
117 Kendrick Street, Suite 200, Needham, MA 02494 Telephone: 781.302.4000  
http://www.prismventure.com/index.cfm?ac=about_prism  
Woody Benson, Managing Partner  
http://www.prismventure.com/index.cfm?ac=bio&id=207  
wlbenson@prismventure.com

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KickApps Corporation  
29 W 38th St, New York, New York 10018  
Telephone: (212) 730-4558  
Alex Blum, CEO  
ABlum@KickApps.com  
Michael Chin, SVP Marketing  
MChin@KickApps.com

Microsoft Corporation,  
100 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
Philip DesAutels, Academic Evangelist Director  
philipdi@microsoft.com

Required Course Readings: (Will be handed out during class or Available in the CMT)  
Robbins, Tony, The Social Media Revolution, YouTube, July 30, 2009  
Shirky, Clay, How Social Media Can Shape History, June 2009  
http://www.ted.com/talks/clay_shirky_how_cellphones_twitter_facebook_can_make_history.html  
Happe, Rachel, Social Media in the Enterprise, Giga Omni Media, April 2009  
Marketing Plan Pro, Version 11.0, Palo Alto Software, 2009 (CMT)  
Kruger and Casey, Focus Groups (3E), Sage Publications, 2002  
Chapter 6 (Analyzing Focus Group Results)  
Focus Group Executive Summary Template One  
Focus Group Executive Summary Template Two  
Manning, Harley, The State of the Art for Personas, Forrester Research, 2006 PowerPoint  
Fowler, Floyd, Survey Research Methods (3E), Sage Publications, Selected Chapters, 2002  
Reichheld, Frederick, The One Number You Need To Grow, Harvard Business Review, December 2003  
Duncan and Dodds, Influentials, Networks, and Public Opinion Formation  
Journal of Consumer Research, December 2007  
Izko, Alex, Guide to the Contextual Web, Blog, December 22, 2008  
Smith, Justin, The Facebook Marketing Bible, Inside Facebook, August 2008  
Owyang, Jeremiah, Online Communities, Build or Join? Forrester, February 28, 2008  
Kolisky, Esteban, Replace Customer Satisfaction Scores with Experience, Gartner, March 7, 2007  
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Grading:
Grading will be based on the following mix of group written and PowerPoint presentations:

Module One: Individual Assessment of Social Media Market
15%
Assignment: Market Analysis and Segmentation of Social Media Applications
Due: Thursday, September 24, 2009
Grade Composition: Written (15%) PowerPoint Presentation (0%)

Module Two: Group Analysis of SMB Social Media Market
20%
Assignment: Analysis and Marketing Plan for KickApps SMB Market
Due: Thursday, October 15, 2009
Grade Composition: Written (15%) PowerPoint Presentation (5%)

3. Module Three: Group Analysis of Enterprise Social Media Market
25%
Assignment: Analysis and Marketing Plan for KickApps Enterprise Market
Due: Thursday, November 12, 2009
Grade Composition: Written (10%) and PowerPoint Presentation (10%)

4. Module Four: Group Analysis of Future Social Media Market
25%
Assignment: Disruptive Changes in Social Media
Due: Thursday, December 10, 2009
Grade Composition: Written (15%) and PowerPoint Presentation (15%)

5. Attendance and Participation
15%
Attendance (5%)
One Unexcused Absence Permitted
Additional Unexcused Absences will reduce final course grade three points
Participation (10%)
Peer Group Evaluations at end of each deliverable will determine participation
Additional reduction in course grade (including failure of course) for continued lack of contribution to group assignments

Grading Note:
The increasing grade emphasis on oral communications is reflective of the need to provide brief but convincing verbal recommendations in the workplace. A recent USA Today article noted that 34% of employers were dissatisfied with the oral communications skills of high school graduates and 45% of college graduates. Special attention will therefore be paid to the creation of PowerPoint slides which are well conceived, uncluttered, and supplemented by value-added oral remarks.

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Module Descriptions:

Module One: What is a Marketing Plan
Understand the fundamental characteristics of new product development
Evaluate the competitive environment, including the positioning of individual competitive offerings as well as a current company’s products
Explore a new target market and marketing plan
Create a marketing plan after conducting secondary research

Module Two: What primary research is required to create a Marketing Plan
Evaluate a company’s proprietary research and determine potential areas of weakness
Design a research plan and conduct primary research to supplement available information on target consumers
Revise a marketing plan after conducting secondary research

Module Three: What primary research is required to create a Marketing Plan for a new target consumer
Determine the value of quantitative primary research in the creation of a marketing plan for a new target consumer
Design and conduct market research on new target consumers
Revise a marketing plan after conducting research on new target consumers

Module Four: What research is required to create a visionary marketing strategy for a company
Determine the value of qualitative versus quantitative primary research in the creation of a marketing plan
Design and conduct in-depth interviews with industry thought leaders
Revise a strategic marketing plan after understanding disruptive changes
Evaluate all of the primary and secondary research to determine final recommendations
Present strategic marketing plan to company management and defend recommendations

CLASS SCHEDULE AND DETAILS:

9/10/09 MODULE ONE
Reading Assignment: None
Optional Reading Assignment: None
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Guest Speakers</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>9/17/09</td>
<td>MODULE ONE</td>
<td>Woody Benson</td>
<td>Required Reading Assignment: KickApps Website and Research Handouts</td>
<td>The Social Media Market</td>
<td>Woody Benson</td>
<td>Execute KickApps and Microsoft Non-Disclosure Agreements</td>
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<td>9/24/09</td>
<td>MODULE TWO (Assignment #1 Due)</td>
<td>Woody Benson, Rick Faulk, and Mike Sommers</td>
<td>Optional Reading Assignment: None</td>
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<td>Woody Benson</td>
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<td>11/12/09</td>
<td>MODULE FOUR (Assignment #3 Due)</td>
<td>Woody Benson</td>
<td>Required Reading Assignment: None</td>
<td>Disruptive Changes in the Social Media Market</td>
<td>Woody Benson</td>
<td>Assignment #3 twelve minute group PowerPoint presentations, Assignment #4 discussion</td>
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Module Four

Required Reading Assignment: None
Optional Reading Assignment: None
Class Topic: Disruptive Changes in the Social Media Market
Guest Speakers: Woody Benson
Class Agenda: Assignment #4 discussion

Assignment One

KickApps describes itself as the first complete social media publishing solution. Its customers are brands, enterprises, and web publishers. Its products are a suite of hosted social and media applications and services. Its benefits enable the largest websites and brands to grow & engage their online audiences and foster deeper relationships with customers.

But KickApps competes in a constantly changing marketplace of new web applications and the purpose of Assignment One is to assess the sales potential of the company. This means you need to conduct a market analysis. Reading Social Media in the Enterprise by Rachel Happe and Woody Benson’s PowerPoint Presentations will help you to begin to focus on “What Business Is KickApps In?” Industry experts have published their opinions on this question. The tighter the definition, the less competition, but the smaller the market potential.

Your deliverable will need to define the market (33% of grade), segment the market (33% of grade), and size the market (33% of grade)

One way to approach the assignment is to understand the KickApps product. This will be presented by Mike Sommers on 9/17/09. After this you can determine which companies are in direct versus indirect competition. This should help you to segment the market. Then you can look at the specific success of the competition, what new products they have introduced, how successful these new products have been, and most importantly, HOW the market is evolving. Look at the customers of KickApps and its competitors and how they are using these applications. This may give you the best insight into Assignment One.

Since there is no correct answer to this question, the most successful deliverables will not be the ones which necessarily estimate the highest sales potential for the market. The most successful deliverables will have thoroughly analyzed the market and provided the best rationale for their share of market and sales estimates.

Assignment Two:

This will be a group written and oral presentation assignment. PowerPoint presentations will be limited to ten minutes each and must be rehearsed in order to avoid exceeding the time limit. All group members must participate in the oral presentation and business attire is required. Written Format: One page Executive Summary with unlimited exhibits. Provide a complete bibliography as one of your exhibits. Use 12 point type and one inch margins. We will publish your work on the class SharePoint or other secure collaborative workspace site.

The purpose of Assignment Two is to create a KickApps Marketing Plan with detailed financial exhibits to penetrate the SMB market. This deliverable is a continuation of the SMB marketing strategy currently underway at KickApps, but will focus on maximizing profitability. In order to complete Assignment Two, your group will need to understand the details of the current KickApps marketing plan, the degree to which KickApps can continue to grow SMB sales, the incremental marketing costs associated with the incremental SMB sales gains, and when KickApps will have maximized SMB sales and profitability.
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Assignment Two will call upon some of the information gathered in Assignment One (like potential market size, estimated market shares and dollar volume,) but you will need to conduct your own primary market research to answer this question. The best deliverables will achieve the highest cumulative incremental profitability in the quickest period of time, using the lowest risk marketing plan.

Grading for Assignment Two will be based on understanding the current KickApps SMB marketing costs (20%), the quality of your primary market research (20%), the creation of a SMB Marketing Plan to maximize profits (20%), the detailed financial assumptions to support the SMB Marketing Plan (20%) and the plan which generates the most incremental profitability in the shortest amount of time (20%)

Assignment Three:
This will be a group written and oral presentation assignment. PowerPoint presentations will be limited to twelve minutes each and must be rehearsed in order to avoid exceeding the time limit. All group members must participate in the oral presentation and business attire is required. Written Format: One page Executive Summary with unlimited exhibits. Provide a complete bibliography as one of your exhibits. Use 12 point type and one inch margins. We will publish your work on the class SharePoint or other secure collaborative workspace site.

The purpose of Assignment Three is to create a KickApps Marketing Plan with detailed financial exhibits to penetrate the Enterprise market. This deliverable is an opportunity to aggressively implement the new Enterprise marketing strategy recently launched at KickApps and will focus on maximizing growth. Assignment Three will call upon all of the information gathered in Assignments One and Two to create a high risk/high reward marketing initiative. As in Assignment Two, you will need to conduct your own primary market research to answer this question. The best deliverables will achieve the highest cumulative incremental sales and profitability in the quickest period of time.

Grading for Assignment Three will be based on understanding the current KickApps Enterprise marketing costs (10%), the quality of your primary market research (20%), the creation of an Enterprise Marketing Plan to maximize profits (20%), the detailed financial assumptions to support the Enterprise Marketing Plan (20%) and the plan which generates the most incremental sales and profitability in the shortest amount of time (20%)

Assignment Four:
This will be a group written and oral presentation assignment. PowerPoint presentations will be limited to fourteen minutes each and must be rehearsed in order to avoid exceeding the time limit. All group members must participate in the oral presentation and business attire is required. Written Format: One page Executive Summary with unlimited exhibits. Provide a complete bibliography as one of your exhibits. Use 12 point type and one inch margins. We will publish your work on the class SharePoint or other secure collaborative workspace site.

The purpose of Assignment Four is to take your cumulative understanding of KickApps, its customers, and its consumers, and design a visionary strategic direction for the company. This will require that you use inductive rather than deductive reasoning and create a disruptive change in social media. Assignment Four is not about incremental growth and much more than a brainstorming assignment. Since there is no correct answer, the best deliverables will have to include both innovative thinking and supporting analysis.

Feel free to conduct whatever research you’d like for Assignment Four. You can talk with as many thought leaders as you’d like or conduct whatever primary or secondary research you think would be helpful as long as your recommendations are original thinking.

The grading for Assignment Four will be based on understanding the specific visionary positions of current industry leaders (25%), developing a truly innovative strategy for the company (25%), providing sufficient supporting facts/analysis/rationale to assure that your strategy is implementable (25%), and providing specific projections that KickApps could achieve if they followed your recommendation (25%).

Attachments:
KickApps Confidentiality Agreement
Bentley College Video Release Form
Peer Group Evaluation Form
Appendix 3: Kick Apps Screen Shots
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Appendix 4: Sample Feedback

From the Class KickApps site

What do you think about last night's class? Comments

• What do you think about last night's class?
  » All Comments

S. Green 4 months ago | Flag

For me, the model and concept of Thursday’s class was great. The 10-minute “pitch” opportunity, Alex's presence and feedback, and the overall cross-table setting was highly educational and realistic. Additionally, the foundation built during the lecture series has been invaluable in grasping the concept of social media. During the last 5-6 weeks I’ve found myself relating virtually everything I do online and at work to the concept. My organization’s marketing group is highly excited about the opportunities social media has created in our industry. On the contrary, I learned from an engaging talk with our IT manager that he has many security concerns with the organizations social media plans. While I might not have coined it social media in the past I’ve been living it all along and in this tech-driven world the phenomenon is now embedded in everyday life. That’s a very powerful observation, so I am excited to participate in a course of this magnitude. I greatly appreciate the efforts of Woody, Perry, the KA team and the high level speakers.

The following is simple honest feedback based on Thursday night. I found that this class challenged my full understanding of the current KA business model and the project at-large – a reversal from where I was just one day prior. As I mentioned during the post-meeting discussion, we were told our big idea was more or less the current business model. Since I have been very engaged throughout the semester this came as a bit of a surprise to me. Throughout the night I sensed KickApps already has a direction in mind to address SMBs: low touch/low friction, a simplified product, and a target market of curious “non-developers” in small business. Regardless of whether I agree or disagree with this direction, prior communication of this vision could have proven helpful in our quest for the big idea. We can work within this realm and create a big idea within these parameters but I didn’t see this as the concept of the project. I wholly accept the
fact that our pitch was not well-received. My manager will not accept everything I throw his way – it happens all the time. I see criticism and confrontation as a valuable character builder and tremendously beneficial in professional development. For that reason I felt the agenda was perfectly suitable and appropriate. However, on a personal level I want to be sure that I am approaching the course and this project in the way it was intended.

Thanks to you and everyone for taking the time to give us your candid feedback. Woody and I would really like it if everyone could join in on this blog. For your information, when someone replies to your blog, an automatic email is sent to you as notification and it looks like this:

The style and content (social media) of this class is definitely different than others that I have taken at Bentley. I have enjoyed the speaker series and it benefits the class very much, especially for the students who do not currently work or have limited interaction with their employer's senior management.

That being said, as a class (including myself) we have been bystanders to the speaker series. Maybe it's the intimidation of Executive level speakers or the unfamiliarity with social media but we have not strongly pressed back for answers or further clarification we need for deliverables/expectations but also for really understanding the business model. After Thursday's unique experience (someone referred to it as an Apprentice like setting) it is disappointing to me that only a few groups in class were willing to put their thoughts out into the forum.

Perry said in class, use of the KickApp755 blog and website has been low. I agree, I do not visit the site often because A) It does not function properly on my MAC and B) It is easy to forget. Is there any email alert feature that I am unaware so when classmates post blogs or respond to posts I know (besides Perry's emails)?
Perry, I agree – I think most of us were expecting the happy warm positive class type stuff we came to know from other classes and we were used to those formats. You’re right - this class is different than any other class I’ve been in before. For me this is one of the things that make Bentley different than getting an MBA from any other place (and in my case - my undergrad alma mater). I think one of the biggest challenges – for all of us – is having the assignments tweaked and adjusted as we go along but you both have been more than accommodating and understanding.

I was caught off by the Apprentice style firing squad at this stage but I think it was tremendously invaluable to experience it within the safety net of school. Woody - you were honest, direct, and straight to the point with your criticism but I did not feel as if you were being curt. No one is being kicked out of school or our jobs from last night. I think we could have the added benefit of talking informally about our ideas first – but then again some of us did that during the week. As for our group, we probably didn’t do that enough and we’ll definitely be seeking out your advice outside of class before we have our formal presentation next Thursday.

Perry both you and Woody are amazing and the guest speakers are too. I really do love social media - it’s literally my job and my life. I’ve been involved and learning since I was 13 on the prodigy and AOL bulletin board services. My experience has mostly been on the technical and day-to-day marketing side of things so concepts like big ideas and strategies are a little new for me – but that is why I am in the MBA program. I had no idea how much I didn’t know.

Thank you for this opportunity. Literally a life changer – hopefully saver.

JohnLawrence, 4 months ago | Flag

Never before in my time at Bentley have I ever felt so energized coming out of a 7:30 class. I feel that what is going on here could be the start of something big, and for that I am excited to be able to potentially plan a role, be it small or large, in it in the short term while planning (not hoping) to reap in the benefits long term and become (to steal a quote from Woody) “filthy stinking rich”.

JohnLawrence, 4 months ago | Flag
The assignments themselves have not been that difficult per say, it’s more or less the direction in how to go about doing it, although I am grateful that there is some availability to guide others on the right path. The idea of not considering grades in this regard is appropriate IMO being that this is a corporate emersion class. Perry said it best a couple weeks ago: “There is no right answer.” Same holds true in the real world. There is no one true way to solve a problem, only an approach that could potentially lead to a resolution. In the real world, they only care about the bottom line and that you get there sooner rather than later, and not necessarily how you indeed get to it.

That being said, I do believe there is some room for improvement in how these sessions can run. As someone mentioned, if an agenda can be provided a couple days prior to class that would be great. The same can be said about readings. If those could be sent out shortly following the previous class for the next one, that would be ideal for a full time working professional like me and many others in the class.

Lastly, the speaker series have been fantastic, and this was one thing I was hoping to enjoy as part of being part of the EMBA program. That being said, if you want to relate this to the real world, it’s all about creating value. So if you feel that whoever you get to come in and speak can indeed provide that relative value-add that can enable my and other groups in the class to come up with a more effective strategy approach to this and future deliverables for KickApps then so be it. Otherwise it would be just as valuable to add that time back and focus on other questions or discussions by those in the class that may result in some very insightful takeaways.

bgaspar, 4 months ago | Flag

Last night was different, but it was also awesome. Generally with an assignment, you work really hard for a few weeks and then give a presentation. If your professor or boss doesn’t like it, they rip you a new one in front of your peers. That’s humiliating. Last night you gave us an opportunity to express our ideas, gave us constructive feedback and guided us onto the right path. That was really thoughtful of you. You could have let us get up there next week and bomb.
It seems that some people are prioritizing grades over learning. Although it would be wonderful if we all got 4.0s, it's not realistic. If I deserve an F, give me an F. If my presentation sucks, tell me my presentation sucks. I am not going to learn or gain anything from this course if you just tell me I am great all of time. And, it's definitely not going to prepare me for the real world.

You guys are doing great and the class is a blast. The guest speaker presentations we've seen are invaluable. Keep up the good work.

AshleyCSpicer, 4 months ago | Flag

Last night was different, but it was also awesome. Generally with an assignment, you work really hard for a few weeks and then give a presentation. If your professor or boss doesn't like it, they rip you a new one in front of your peers. That's humiliating. Last night you gave us an opportunity to express our ideas, gave us constructive feedback and guided us onto the right path. That was really thoughtful of you. You could have let us get up there next week and bomb.

AshleyCSpicer, 4 months ago | Flag

Last night was a great class. I understood where the woman was coming from when she said she felt like she didn't have enough time to work on the project- we didn't. But that's life. When I'm assigned a task at work, if it's not completed on time I can't tell my boss that I was too busy- that's an unacceptable answer in the real world. And, frankly, those of us that work full time and go to school part time signed up for this life. I have no false expectations that my semesters aren't going to be
anything but rushed, stressful, and hellish- but it's all worth it.

My only suggestion would be to provide the agenda a day or two in advance. Any meeting I have attended/led for 3 different companies has always had a list of attendee’s and the agenda. I know my group tripped up on the “What's your big idea” because we hadn't classified just one, and were prepared to talk about our whole plan.

Keep the feedback coming- it’s the only way to figure out how to make a strong marketing plan.

While completing my undergraduate degree I took an intermediate finance course. We had to write a 30-50 page paper that took all semester and had 10 minutes to present it on the last day. The professor reserved the right to interrupt us in anyway he chose during our presentation and would try to trip us up deliberately as we orated. What I learned was invaluable - like how to defend my point quickly and effectively and to always be ready to backup anything I state. We all understand this, but it is very different when you are up there. Frankly, I appreciated that I was being treated like a professional vs. a student. I think while mock firing-squad of investors/lenders can sound stressful, it actually helps you think on your feet. I think feedback has been too positive. I like being told I'm wrong, it’s a great way to learn.