Learning from simulation design to develop better experiential learning initiatives – An integrative approach

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Abstract

Simulations offer engaging learning experiences, via the provision of feedback or the opportunities for experimentation. However, they lack important attributes valued by marketing educators and employers. This paper proposes a 'back to basics' look at what constitutes an effective experiential learning initiative. Drawing on the education literature, the paper presents a set of propositions for the development of initiatives that deliver deep learning, promote engagement, and develop digital marketing and soft skills. The paper notes the attributes of simulations that deliver effective experiential learning, but also where other formats may be superior to simulations; and advocates for an integrative approach. The paper illustrates the application of these propositions, and integrative approach, to the development of a highly successful experiential learning initiative, the Google Online Marketing Challenge. The paper concludes with the following recommendations for marketing educators engaged in experiential learning: students need to plan, execute and assess their actions, which requires the provision of feedback mechanisms as part of the experience; the experience should be gamified to increase engagement; developers need to provide guidance and support, to both students and educators, to reduce extraneous cognitive load; the initiative needs to develop digital marketing literacy, as well as soft skills.

Simulations are valuable instruments to teach marketing, as they allow for experimentation, and the application of knowledge to a specific context (Pal, Stubbs & Lee, 2005). In addition, the provision of feedback and the iterative nature of simulations help to keep students engaged (Smith, 2001). Bringing simulations into the marketing classroom, allows students to learn about certain marketing phenomena by experiencing them, and by reflecting on the consequences of their actions.

However, as simulations are simplified versions of reality (Pal et al, 2005), they may fail to achieve desired learning objectives. For instance, simulations may fail to test the students' ability to solve a contemporary challenge (Sroufe and Ramos, 2011) or students may repeatedly overplay a simulation (Schibrowsky & Peltier, 1995). Moreover, simulations may fail to develop skills that are relevant for employability, such as communication skills (Barker 2014) or familiarity with social media tools (Walker, 2014). These limitations may lead marketing educators and, indeed students, to resist the use of simulations, thus missing on the potential pedagogical benefits of using this tool in the classroom. This paper seeks to address this problem by moving the discussion away from simulations as a specific approach to teaching marketing, and focusing, instead, on the principles of experiential learning, of which simulations are a manifestation.

Experiential learning is extremely relevant in marketing education, as evidenced by the fact that the first issue of the Journal of Marketing Education explicitly discussed the topic (see Marcus, 1979). As marketing students are learning about consumer behaviour and management issues, they face various practical and ethical constraints in terms of hands-on learning. Hence, experiential learning techniques such as live marketing projects or computer based simulations, have emerged as crucial mechanisms for students to learn about marketing

problems, in an active, experimental way (Brennan 2014), paying deed to the old Confucian dictum '*Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand*'.

Despite the popularity of experiential learning in marketing, many initiatives fail to enable a deep learning experience (Young, Caudill & Murphy, 2008). Some also fail to meet the expectations or requirements of students (Hunter-Jones, 2012), higher education institutions (Brennan 2014) or employers (Walker, 2014). The purpose of this paper is to identify the core principles of effective experiential learning.

By focusing on the principles of experiential learning, rather than specific manifestations such as simulations, it is possible to identify the features that deliver powerful and effective learning experiences. This, in turn, empowers educators to design or choose experiential learning initiatives that best match their goals. The paper also contributes to the literature on the role of simulations in the marketing classroom, by moving away from a dichotomic view of simulations, to an integrative one, where features of simulation design may be used alongside features of other forms of experiential learning to meet the needs of today's marketing students and educators.

To achieve this goal, the paper reviews the literature on experiential learning. Based on this body of work, the paper presents five propositions for the successful development of experiential learning initiatives. The paper then illustrates the application of these five propositions by focusing on a highly successful, technology based experiential learning initiative, which the co-authors helped create. This initiative, the Google Online Marketing Challenge, now in its eighth year, has attracted over 100,000 students and professors from

around 100 countries, and led directly to the employment of participating students. The paper concludes with the formulation of various recommendations for marketing educators who may be considering the development of experiential learning initiatives for their students.

Experiential Learning in Marketing Education – Benefits and Challenges

Experiential learning is a process of learning requiring active involvement with an experience. It contrasts with didactic learning, where students read or are told about others' experiences of the topic. In marketing, experiential learning often takes the form of participation in live marketing projects for real word businesses, or computer based simulations (Brennan 2014). The common characteristic among the various types of experiential learning activities is that students work with authentic problems, in an information-rich environment, and must develop their own solutions for those problems (Kirschner, Sweller & Clark, 2006).

Experiential learning activities deliver three important benefits. First, experiential learning can enhance the acquisition of knowledge, particularly tacit knowledge (Ardley & Taylor, 2010). Second, it offers the active approach to learning favoured by today's students, as opposed to the passive learning of didactic approaches (Ganesh & Sun, 2009). Third, it allows students to develop employability skills, over and above the acquisition of topical knowledge, that employers value (Barker, 2014) and, hence, help students secure employment.

Brennan (2014), however, is keen to distinguish between experiential learning and experience, adding that the latter does not necessarily lead to the former. That is, participation in an experiential learning activity does not, in itself, ensure the achievement of the three

potential benefits previously identified. Brennan (2014) goes on to argue that poorly designed experiential learning activities may result in superficial learning, lack of engagement, and student frustration. The question, then, is how can marketing educators ensure that the experiential learning activities that they develop for, or that they implement in, their courses ensure deep learning, are engaging, and help acquire employability skills?

The remainder of this section considers each of the three stated benefits in turn, and draws on education literature to develop a set of propositions to guide the development of experiential learning initiatives in marketing courses. The propositions are summarized in Table 1.

== Insert Table 1 here ==

Ensuring deep learning

Education scholars that look at the effectiveness of experiential learning initiatives often find little or no evidence that such initiatives deliver the deep, meaningful, long-term learning that they were meant to achieve. For instance, Bacon and Stewart (2006) detected that students engaging in project-related work did not retain as much learning as expected, while McDermott and Shaffer (1992) observed that successful completion of problem-solving tasks did not always correspond positively with conceptual understanding of the underlying concepts.

Young and colleagues (2008) investigated the causes behind the poor effectiveness of some experiential learning initiatives. They concluded that for such initiatives to deliver deep learning, students need to go beyond the concrete experience that they are engaged in, and be

guided through a process of reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. However, these benefits are sometimes difficult to achieve within the scope of one single experiential learning project. For instance, live projects offer powerful learning opportunities by requiring students to test their learning in practice (Sara, 2011) and solving contemporary challenges (Sroufe and Ramos, 2011). Yet students rarely see evidence of the outcome of their recommendations or actions. As a result, any reflection in live projects tends to report rather than analyze what happened (Kosnik, Tingle & Blanton III, 2013). Moreover, as projects tend to focus only on one specific task (Kosnik et al, 2013), there are limited opportunities for abstraction from the specific case, and even less so for experimentation.

Simulations can overcome some live projects' limitations. Simulations usually run over more than one (fictional) period, offering students regular, tailored information about the outcome of their decisions. Students are, then, encouraged to review their decisions based on the feedback provided, and to use this insight in the next round of decision-making (Smith, 2001). This cycle of feedback and further action supports experimentation. However, simple data outputs do not reveal the rationale supporting the students' decisions (Pal et al, 2005) and may not be a result of reflective observation. Therefore, achieving high scores in a simulation does not mean that the student acquired enhanced learning (Gopinath and Sawyer, 1999).

Based on the previous discussion, it is proposed that:

> **Proposition 1a**: To enable deep learning, experiential learning initiatives should run over more than one period, and include a feedback mechanism such that students can use data outcomes from one period to inform decision-making in the subsequent one.

Proposition 1b: To enable deep learning, experiential learning initiatives should require students to explain the rationale of their decisions, and to reflect on the meaning of the data outcomes.

Ensuring engagement

Experiential learning is more suitable than didactic approaches for today's students; students are used to interactive environments and highly engaging experiences (Ganesh & Sun, 2009). Accordingly, defenders of experiential learning (e.g., Sara, 2011) often report high levels of student enthusiasm for such projects. They argue that the '*safety of the classroom environment and central directive role of the faculty member in the class discussions or exercises*' (p. 616) typical of didactic learning can hinder students' enthusiasm with the course, and their engagement with the exercises or discussions (Kosnik et al, 2013). To increase student engagement, educators need to learn about the students' context, and bring elements of that context into the classroom environment (Green & Bavelier, 2012).

Games in general, and digital-based games in particular, are an integral part of how today's learners socialize and experiment (Ito et al, 2012). Therefore, gamifying the learning experience offers a sense of familiarity to the students, which supports their engagement with the class, and their learning (Kapp, 2012). Robson, Plangger, Kietzmann, McCarthy and Pitt (2015) identify three types of mechanics used to gamify an experience. The first type, setup mechanics, includes aspects such as the location of the experience (e.g., online vs. offline) or the objects needed to perform the experience. Experiential learning activities in digital environments should be particularly appealing to today's students. Digital technology supports collaboration, discussion and information sharing (Ingraham, Watson, McDowell,

Brockett & Fitzpatrick, 2002), and has become part of students' '*taken-for-granted social and cultural fabric of learning, play, and social communication*' (Ito et al, 2012, p. vii).

The second type of gamification mechanics, rule mechanics, concerns the actions that are possible within the experience, as well as any relevant constraints (Robson et al, 2015). For instance, in live projects, students usually have only one opportunity to apply what they learned (e.g., as a presentation or a report submitted to the client); they have various opportunities in simulations. In turn, time constraints pressure participants into action, while budgets and other financial considerations are a common feature of experiential learning initiatives to make them more realistic (e.g., Pal et al, 2005).

The third and final type of mechanics, progression mechanics, concerns the means to reinforce desired behaviours and signal progress (Robson et al, 2015). Introducing stages and milestones is a particularly effective way of capturing learner interest and offering a sense of progress. The introduction of social elements such as leader boards and competitive features can provide additional motivation to perform well (Huang & Soman, 2013).

In contrast with these positive views, some authors note experiential learning issues with certain student types. Hunter-Jones (2012) notes that students that have gone through a highly-structured learning process, and learned how to achieve high grades in that system, dislike the uncertainty and the lack of structure associated with experiential learning. Ackerman and Hu (2011), too, suggest that experiential learning does not suit all student types. Students with high learning autonomy respond better to experiential learning initiatives than students with low autonomy (Ackerman & Hu, 2011); autonomy defined as the students' capacity to self motivate, self regulate, and make their own choices (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Lack of guidance negatively influences the experiential learning outcomes and the motivation of students with low learning autonomy (Ackerman & Hu, 2011). Finally, experiential learning often requires improvisation and flexibility (Trevisan, 2004), which challenges some students.

Educators can address student resistance and improve student outcomes by providing some structure to the learning experience (Brennan, 2014). The educators must ensure that students are '*equipped to respond in a manner that is congruent with the objectives of the learning activity*' (Feinstein, Mann & Corsun, 2002, p. 735).

In addition to students, educators may resist the experiential learning initiative, even when they recognize the benefits. Brennan (2014) notes that the adoption of experiential learning initiatives in the marketing curriculum is often by '*enthusiasts with a passion for the approach*' (p. 100), and that such initiatives are far from being a routine component of marketing curricula. This low adoption could be because educators often make pedagogical choices based on their comfort with a particular technique and its ease of use, rather than the technique's effectiveness in achieving a desired learning outcome (Feinstein et al, 2002). These observations mean that educators, too, need support in their use of experiential learning initiatives.

Therefore, it is proposed that:

> **Proposition 2a**: To support engagement, experiential learning initiatives should incorporate gamification mechanics.

Proposition 2b: To support engagement, experiential learning initiatives should provide structured guidance and training, to both students and educators.

Ensuring the development of employability skills

There is an increasing expectation that universities will prepare students for their professional careers -- developing the skills valued by their employers, over and above delivering subject-specific knowledge (Brennan, 2014). For that end, universities need to understand what skills employers value highly and what skills best reflect the current job market (Wilton, 2008).

Following a study of skills valued by employers of business and marketing students, Barker (2014) concludes that the professional competency most valued by UK employers is communication skills, followed by problem solving and overall quality of work. There is also a need to work well in teams because business professionals often produce outputs in collaboration, and with colleagues who may be in other countries (Smith 2001). In addition, various surveys (e.g., IBM, 2013) indicate that digital technology is a key driving force in marketing, and that there is a gap in digital literacy among marketing professionals (Walker, 2014). Consequently, there is increasing pressure for marketing educators to help their students develop digital marketing skills (Payne, Campbell, Ball & Piercy, 2011).

Experiential learning projects help students develop '*particular skills in communication, negotiation and professionalism which, are hard to simulate within the academy*' (Sara, 2011, p. 8). However, Feinstein et al (2002) believe that computer-based simulations are an unsuitable mechanism to develop interpersonal or team skills. Moreover, simulations are, by nature, simplified versions of reality (Pal et al., 2005), and may fail to reflect characteristics of the business environment that are relevant for employability. For instance, they may not

require students to use social media tools, which are relevant skills for marketing graduates (Walker, 2014).

In contrast, live projects are good for the development of inter-personal skills, as students must usually engage with non-specialist audiences (Sara, 2011). However, there may be few or no opportunities for students to acquire direct experience with digital marketing tools (Walker, 2014).

Based on these arguments, it is proposed that:

> **Proposition 3**: To enhance student employability, experiential learning initiatives should develop general skills such as communication or inter-personal capabilities, as well as digital marketing expertise.

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section showed that, while experiential learning may be a cornerstone of marketing education, its benefits are neither automatic nor guaranteed. Moreover, while simulations deliver many experiential learning benefits, they fail to deliver others. Therefore, educators need to plan, carefully, the design of the experiential learning initiative, and consider complementing simulations with other formats of experiential learning such as live projects. The next section illustrates the application of the above propositions summarized in Table 1, to the development of an experiential learning initiative, the Google Online Marketing Challenge.

Developing a successful experiential learning initiative: the Google Online Marketing Challenge

The Google Online Marketing Challenge (GOMC) is a group-based experiential learning activity, where students develop and implement an online marketing plan for a small to medium sized enterprise (SME), following the steps outlined in Figure 1.

== Insert Figure 1 here ==

The idea for this initiative originated in March 2007, when one of the co-authors of this paper was talking with one of his recent graduates, who worked with Google, about real world exercises for marketing students. They felt that graduates lacked understanding of search marketing, which was and still is the largest form of online advertising (CMO, 2015) for companies of all sizes.

The original idea was for the professor's students to use AdWords to conduct online advertising campaigns for real businesses. The idea soon morphed into a global competition that Google endorsed and supported. These two originators connected with the other co-author of this paper, as well as two US academics. Together, they set out to design a learning experience that would '*provide students with an engaging and effective real-world task that prepare them as cutting-edge online marketers, (...) connect the Higher Education community with local businesses (and) provide instructors with an interesting theory-based and commercially practical assessment item for their students*' (Neale, Hofacker, Hunter, Hudson, Canhoto & Murphy, 2008, p. 30).

Counter-intuitively, none of the academics involved had ever used search engine marketing. However, they had, and continue to have, a keen interest on online marketing, as well as in the use of new technologies in teaching and learning.

The GOMC has been running since 2008. As of October 2015, 100,000+ students and professors from almost 100 countries, have participated in this experiential learning initiative, according to GOMC's official website (google.com/onlinechallenge/). Students have worked with clients as varied as a comic book store, a small manufacturing company, and an adoption agency (Tuzovic, Wetsch & Murphy, 2011). The GOMC has also been the subject of various academic articles from educators, reflecting on how it enhanced their modules (e.g., Brown & Albright, 2013, Neale, Treiblmaier, Hernderson, Hunter, Hudson & Murphy, 2009) and student employability (e.g., Jansen et al, 2008; Tuzovic et al, 2011). This is, thus, a successful experiential learning initiative. What follows is a reflection of how the GOMC's features enable students and educators to reach the benefits of experiential learning.

Ensuring deep learning

The students need to work with a small or medium organization, which gives them an opportunity to explore the application in practice of marketing concepts learned in the classroom. Specifically, the students need to conduct a market audit and learn about the client's business and marketing goals, in order to outline and present an online marketing plan. This exercise is captured in the pre-campaign report, which the students need to submit before they can run their proposed campaign. This is the point at which many live projects end, meaning that students do not actually see how their plan would work in practice. In the GOMC, however, after submitting their pre-campaign reports, the students move on to launch their online marketing campaigns.

While the online campaign is live, students get near real-time feedback on their actions via detailed performance analytics. Based on these data outputs, the teams revise their plans and take corrective action, for which, again, they get feedback. Students can go through the cycle of action-feedback-corrective action several times during ae three-weeks period, or until they use up all of their US$ 250 budget. Students, thus, examine their ideas and integrate them with new information, which is a core principle of experiential learning outlined by Kolb and Kolb (2005). This feedback feature also supports reflective observation and active experimentation in the students, as recommended by Young et al (2008).

Performance analytics are present in many simulations, but absent from most live projects. However, simulations offer a simplified version of reality, whereas the GOMC offers students the opportunity of working with real conditions. For instance, when students place an AdWords advertisement, they participate in a live auction with all other advertisers interested in the same keywords, and the cost of the ad changes dynamically to reflect the advertisers' interest in those keywords. This interaction, an instance of holistic adaptation to the world and synergetic interactions with the environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), means that the GOMC merges the best aspects of live projects and simulations.

The process of abstract conceptualization necessary for deep learning is further assisted by the requirement for students to produce a post-campaign report. In this report, students need to reflect on the outcome of the campaign, the extent to which it met the original goals, develop well-justified recommendations for the client, and reflect on their interactions with both the client and team members.

Ensuring engagement

The GOMC is largely setup on the online environment, which makes this initiative accessible to students globally, at any time of the day. It is also a working environment that students are used to, adding an element of familiarity.

The strict budget and time limits are important rule mechanics in GOMC. The financial constraint is realistic, forcing students to choose between alternative actions and solve conflicts, which is an important feature of experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In turn, the time constraint leads to focused attention on the task at hand (Smith, 2001), and creates pressure for the players (Robson et al, 2015).

The online set-up also enables students to visualize the impact of their actions immediately, creating an iterative and interactive experience. The dashboards, graphs and analytics' displays help students track progress, showing them which behaviours produced good outcomes and should, thus, be continued, and those that should be changed. Moreover, by completing the GOMC, the student teams enter into a worldwide competition against all other student teams using the GOMC on any given year. This characteristic makes the GOMC, possibly, the world's largest in-class competition for higher education students. Prizes at both regional and global level include computing devices, personalized certificates and trips. The educators that entered and taught the winning teams also get prizes and certificates, as recognition for their effort and their role in their students' success. In addition, non-profit organizations partnering with the top three winning teams receive from $5,000 to $15,000 dollars, a further incentive for engagement with the students and the learning experience. Moreover, the official GOMC website features the finalists, further increasing the visibility of the students' and educator's achievements.

To overcome student and educator resistance due to lack of familiarity with online marketing technology, Google employees and academics developed a broad range of free resources available to participants, including dedicated online communities and a video channel. The information in Table 2 below summarizes the current GOMC resources, though many others are available on the web.

== Insert Table 2 here ==

These resources aim to provide structured guidance and training, to both students and educators. They help participants familiarize themselves with the tools, and find solutions to technical problems that may emerge. This guided learning approach, which has been shown to be superior to unguided discovery in cementing learning during complex learning activities (Mayer, 2004), may also explain why the GOMC appeals to students from so many different countries, including those with learning systems that favour rote learning and routine over improvisation and adaptability.

It is also worth noting that there are no additional costs for the students, the educator or, indeed, the client organization given that the teams receive a free voucher from the GOMC organizers. The campaign stops when the student team exhausts the budget. Therefore, the GOMC is cheaper to run that most simulations.

Ensuring the development of employability skills

The GOMC founders perceived a gap between the skills of recent graduates and those needed by employers, particularly organizations with small marketing budgets, like SMEs and not-for-profits. When work on the GOMC started, the creators' efforts focused on search engine marketing, which was the leading form of online marketing at the time (IAB, 2009). Over time, the GOMC has evolved to include social media components, and mobile advertising. These revisions ensure that the GOMC continues to develop the students' digital marketing literacy, which is a key component of programmes for development of marketing students' employability skills (Payne et al, 2011, Walker, 2014).

The GOMC focuses on SMEs and non-profit organizations in recognition that many marketing students are employed by one such organization. Yet, often the examples used in marketing textbooks or the classroom are limited to large, multinational firms, and thus fail to give students an accurate view of the challenges faced by organizations with much smaller marketing budgets. Moreover, working with small to medium sized enterprises is particularly beneficial for students, as these organizations offer a broad range of experiences and insights (Barker, 2014).

By working with real clients, and in teams, students also develop soft employability skills such as oral communication, negotiation, and time management. Moreover, the requirement to submit written reports develops the students' written communication skills, while the limit of four pages for the pre-campaign report and eight pages for the post-campaign report forces students to communicate concisely.

Finally, the best evidence that the GOMC initiative delivers valuable employability skills are the stories of students that secured jobs as a direct result of participation in the GOMC. For

instance, Tuzovic et al (2011) report that 20% of students in a single undergraduate class were offered jobs specifically because of their participation in the GOMC.

Discussion and implications for the development of experiential learning projects

Drawing on the education literature reviewed in this paper, five principles of effective experiential learning have been identified, which support deep learning, engagement, and employability. Some of these principles are met by the mechanics of simulations, via the provision of feedback or the opportunities for experimentation. However, simulations may fall short on other principles such as realism, or the development of soft skills. This does not mean that simulations no longer have a role in the marketing classroom, but that its format needs to evolve.

This paper argues that, instead of educators considering simulations as an either / or approach to experiential learning, they should integrate aspects of simulation design with aspects from other forms of experiential learning. This integration is illustrated via the experience of the co-authors in creating the GOMC. Based on the literature reviewed, and the authors' experience, the following recommendations are presented.

The first recommendation is that the experiential learning initiative creates conditions for the students to implement their plan within a set time period. This would be difficult in the physical environment, but is feasible in the online environment. For instance, while it would be difficult and expensive to create a television advertisement, students can easily create a YouTube advert to demonstrate their ideas (Payne et al, 2011). Or, instead of creating a series of guidelines for how an organization could communicate effectively with its customers, students can be asked to set up a blog and write a series of blogposts, as in Tuzovic and Kuppelwieser (2014).

As noted by many (e.g., Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009), projects involving real clients are time consuming and complex to manage. It is, thus, unsurprising that many educators avoid such projects (Brennan, 2014), particularly those leading modules with many students (Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009). In such cases, instead of working with clients, students could be asked to develop their own new product ideas, and to produce content (blogs, YouTube videos, or Pinterest boards) or engage in social media conversations with target customers or even online influencers (e.g., via Twitter). Walker (2014) describes one such initiative, where students were asked, among other things, to build a Pinterest board to explain a new product idea, and to produce a YouTube video to communicate that idea.

The second recommendation is that students evaluate the outcome of their actions and take corrective action. Once again, this would be easier in the online environment than in the physical one. The online environment is accessible, and has the additional advantage of offering various forms of feedback -- quantitative (e.g., number of views or number of likes) and qualitative (e.g., comments) -- that allow students to monitor the performance of their initiatives. Furthermore, students can be asked to reflect on the meaning and significance of these indicators, and use the insights to inform further action (e.g., the content of future blog posts), as advised by Kolb and Kolb (2005).

For projects where an online component is irrelevant or undesirable, students could test their ideas with potential customers, for instance, using mock-up advertisements. Alternatively, students could deliver an interim presentation to the client, and reassess their plans based on the client's feedback.

The third recommendation is to gamify the experiential learning initiative, for instance following the mechanics outlined in Robson et al (2015). Educators can specify, for instance, which social media platforms students must use, or what outputs they must produce, as part of the experience. These requirements ensure fairness among the students, and focus their minds on the task at hand. For instance, reflecting on the use of blogs in experiential learning initiatives, Tuzovic and Kuppelwieser (2014) say that asking students to produce a content schedule should lead to increased participation and posting consistency.

Educators should also introduce constraints, such as strict budgets and time limits, for certain tasks. For instance, while students may have the whole semester to plan, execute and evaluate a marketing campaign, the execution part of the campaign should have clear start and end dates, akin to how simulations are generally used within modules (see Pal et al, 2005, Smith 2001).

Moreover, to provide a sense of progress, educators should introduce milestones, such as submitting the campaign plan by a given date; and specify tangible targets, such as achieving a certain number of views. Furthermore, the educator can introduce an element of completion to further increase engagement, by making progress towards those targets visible to the whole group. Educators could also consider token prizes for the winning teams, though it is important that those prizes reward both desirable behaviour (Robson et al, 2015) and factors that the students can control.

The fourth recommendation is to provide specific guidance on the process and the technical aspects of the project. This guidance reduces what Brennan (2014) describes as '*extraneous load*' (p. 105), that is, cognitive load that does not contribute to the learning experience. For

instance, educators can provide links to video tutorials on how to set up social media accounts and perform key tasks (Walker, 2014), or host guest talks from experienced users of the technology in question to share best practice and examples (Tuzovic & Kuppelwieser, 2014).

The fifth recommendation is that educators ensure they are developing the right employability skills. While soft skills such as team work, written and verbal communication are likely to remain in high demand by employers (Wilton, 2008), hard skills such as familiarity with particular software or social media platform are likely to change. For instance, content marketing has shifted from an emphasis on content production to an emphasis on content distribution (Schaefer, 2015). An experiential learning project focusing on the former might ask students to develop a content calendar or practice their copyright skills. In contrast, a project focusing on the latter might ask students to share the same blog post across various platforms (e.g., WordPress, LinkedIn and Medium) and then compare performance. To ensure relevance of employability skills, Barker (2014) recommends consultation with recent graduates as well as employers.

Finally, developing and helping run the GOMC was a difficult task for the authors. Even after almost a decade there is still room for improvement, such as simplifying instructions, or answering queries promptly. Moreover, engaging with a process and technology that they were entirely unfamiliar with was, at times, an uncomfortable experience. Hence, a final word of advice would be that educators do not underestimate the practical and emotional barriers of developing experiential learning initiatives for their courses. Yet, as Walker (2014) noted, it is important to embrace these challenges, for the credibility of higher education and to fulfil the educators' responsibility towards their students.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Summary of Propositions for the Development of Experiential Learning Initiatives

Targeted benefit	Proposition
Ensuring deep learning	**Proposition 1a**: To enable deep learning, experiential learning initiatives should run over more than one period, and include a feedback mechanism such that students can use data outcomes from one period to inform decision-making in the subsequent one.
	Proposition 1b: To enable deep learning, experiential learning initiatives should require students to explain the rationale of their decisions, and to reflect on the meaning of the data outcomes.
Ensuring engagement	**Proposition 2a**: To support engagement, experiential learning initiatives should incorporate gamification mechanics.
	Proposition 2b: To support engagement, experiential learning initiatives should provide structured guidance and training to both students and educators.
Ensuring the development of employability skills	**Proposition 3**: To enhance student employability, experiential learning initiatives should develop general skills such as communication or inter-personal capabilities, as well as digital marketing expertise.

Figure 1. Steps of the GOMC

Step 1: Registering for the Challenge. Professors register for the Challenge and get verified by Google. Students form teams of 3-6 members and appoint a Team Captain.

Step 2: Accessing Dashboard. The student team can add required information to the dashboard, move onto identifying competition partner and preparing AdWords Pre-Campaign Report.

Step 3: Selecting a Business. The team needs to identify a client business or a non-profit organization.

Step 4: Learning about AdWords and the Client. The online advertising strategy needs to be outlined in the AdWords Pre-Campaign Report.

Step 5: Uploading Pre-Campaign Report and Requesting Crediting. AdWords credit of $250 is applied to the team's account.

Step 6: Running Campaign. The student team can start running their campaign over the period of up to 21 calendar days.

Step 7: Writing and Submitting AdWords Post-Campaign Report/Impact Statement. The student team must submit their report(s) prior to the end of the Campaign Window.

Step 8: Google+ Social Media Marketing Award (Optional). The student team works with their partner on creating and maintaining a Google+ page for five consecutive weeks

during the Campaign Window.

Step 9: Judging and Awards. Google and a panel of independent academics select the winning teams based on the success of their campaign and the quality of their reports.

Source: adapted from GOMC's official website (google.com/onlinechallenge/discover/)

Table 2. Educational resources available via the GOMC official website

Resource	Description
Digital Marketing Course	Online modular course that teaches students about tools such as search advertising or social media engagement, and leads on to certification.
Professor Dashboard	Helps educators monitor their teams' activities and performance.
My Client Center	Helps educators monitor their teams' campaigns.
Tools for online success	Resource developed in association with the US Small Business Administration, to help small businesses learn how to succeed online.
GOMC Google + community	Open online community for GOMC aficionados
GOMC Google+ academic community	Closed online community for GOMC academics
GOMC YouTube channel	Collection of official GOMC videos

Source: adapted from GOMC's official website

(google.com/onlinechallenge/discover/resources.html)