The New Ad-Marketing 101: Ditch the Text Books, Embrace the Chaos

By Andrew (Andy) Rohm

Within the higher education community, professors have become too comfortable using textbooks. In the field of marketing, which I teach at the college level, our best textbooks contain loads of useful information ranging from the 4 Ps to how to do a SWOT analysis. However, the challenge arises once the school work is done and the books have been read – and students land their first agency or client-side job. The safety net that the classroom once provided is suddenly gone and the shock of real life sets in.

Newly-graduated (and inherently talented) students are left to deal with the haziness and uncertainty of entering the workplace with little or no real-world preparation.

It doesn’t have to be like this. There is a revolution taking place where educators and private sector companies are coming together to give students practical experience in university classrooms. At Loyola Marymount University’s M-School, we’ve found that this is the best training and preparation marketing students can receive while still in the safe confines of the classroom. From building real life marketing industry scenarios to developing courses that tap industry leaders as guest professors, there is another way…and it’s working.

As companies everywhere grapple with the talent crisis and ad agencies and marketers continue to lose top candidates to other fields, it is incumbent on educators to better prepare students for the unknown – that first step into their post-grad life. Here are three ways Universities can become part of the solution:

**Reduce or eliminate dependence** on textbooks in order to become more reliant on active and engaged learning sessions, led by industry pros and mentors who bring their own unique experiences.

**Create semi-structured, project-based** assignments and rubrics that outline the course or project expectations. This will force students to take the initiative to fill in the blanks make and support assumptions in the face of less-than-perfect information and data, and develop logical and defensible POVs in support of their assumptions.

**Develop partnerships with local businesses** and enlist leaders to teach classes, host sessions off campus and provide on-site internship and training programs within their own walls. This allows students to gain the most current insights and practice techniques in their respective fields of study.

For us at the M-School, we’ve been able to engage the Los Angeles advertising and branding community, which has translated to happier and more prepared graduates. Students learn from and inside leading organizations including ad agencies like Ignited, Deutsch LA, TOMS, TBWA\Chiat\Day, Resolution Media, Universal McCann, and tech companies and marketers.
like Facebook, Google and Electronic Arts. To date, nearly 90 percent of M-School students have secured positions at leading agencies. This isn’t a coincidence.

A recent Gallup study featured in the New York Times showed how graduates who benefitted from some type of mentorship or meaningful internship while still in college reported significantly higher levels of engagement with their subsequent work. Sadly, only one in five respondents to the Gallup study indicated they had such a mentorship and less than one in three indicated they had experienced some type of relevant internship.

So, with all due respect to marketing scholars and experts who’ve written such detailed and complete textbooks, it is up to us as educators and industry professionals to harness the uncertainty (and dare I say even chaos) that is inherent in our industry and build it into the college experience. Doing so will help our students learn to expect and even embrace the ambiguity that they will soon face in the real world.