

A 7-Point Program for Successful Academic Research In Marketing

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ABSTRACT

The farther you are from North America, the more challenging it is to pursue a successful academic career in Marketing. Provided are seven concrete recommendations that should help make that task a bit less challenging.

INTRODUCTION

John Roberts' (2000), in another article in this issue, developed the case that geography is not a relevant segmentation basis for academic research success in marketing: markets and customers are sufficiently similar globally so that geographic focus is not one of the main decisions that a researcher should make when deciding on a research strategy. The three relevant decisions are: problem domain, methodology and quality level.

Problem domain decisions concern the type of marketplace you are interested in (consumer/business to business, products/services) and the types of issues you wish to study. Good sources for such issues can be found on the web sites of The Marketing Science Institute and the Institute for the Study of Business Markets (www.msi.org and www.smeal.psu.edu/isbm), both of which publish timely research priorities. The goals, priorities, and guidelines of these organisations are further discussed in Rod Brodie's (2000) paper in this issue.

A second important decision to be addressed in concert with the problem domain is the research methodology. While the problem should help dictate the methodology, marketing academics have background in psychology, sociology, operations research, statistics, economics and apply the methods from their core disciplines to the marketing problems they are addressing. I have argued elsewhere (Daneels and Lilien, 1998a, b and also see Dowling, 1998) that, especially early in their careers, marketing academics should partner early and often. While we do much partnering, we tend to collaborate with researchers with like skills, although the range of application domains and methodologies in marketing suggests that a search for complementary skills may be more fruitful in bringing the right set of tools to the right problem.

A third decision that a researcher must make is the quality-target or aspiration level for his or her research. The issue surrounds who you want to reach and affect with your research: do you want to play the game globally (impact the world) or be satisfied with impact on some local market, however defined. Marketing is a large field and has a number of core journals as well as journals that focus on niches (*Journal of Business to Business Marketing*, *Journal of Services Marketing*, *Journal of Advertising Research* and so forth).

There are also journals in our foundation fields such as economics, sociology, psychology, and statistics that have great reach and impact. And, in either formal or informal ways we assign quality rankings to these journals. In most world class business schools, scholars are expected to aim at the top global journals. In spite of the size of the marketing field, at the time of this writing, there were only four journals devoted exclusively to marketing that business schools generally assign a top or "A" rating to: *The Journal of Marketing*, *The Journal of Marketing Research*, *Marketing Science*, and *The Journal of Consumer Research* (others credited as "A" would include sections of journals devoted to marketing such as *Management Science*). Top journals in foundation fields (such *Econometrica*, *Psychometrika*, *The American Journal of Sociology*) are on the "A" list of most business schools as well.

By almost any measure the global geographic centre of gravity for research in business is North America. For example, the UK-based Financial Times Survey, involving 106 business schools and over 20,000 mailed surveys (of which over 5000 were returned) finds all the top 10 business schools in the world in terms of research located in the United States. (<http://www.ft.com/ftsurveys/sp880e.htm>). A glance at the editorial boards of the journals that are generally regarded as tops in the marketing field confirms this North American-centre of research activity and productivity. So, I will reflect on 7 bits of advice for researchers (especially young researchers) outside North America who aspire to have an impact on the North American driven world marketing stage.

Have Good Parents

A good, globally recognized PhD is a great start. Not only does such a degree give you good training, but it networks you into a peer group of scholars who will help you throughout your career. Your PhD advisor or a committee member who may act as a mentor can help guide you through the do's and don't's of the research and publication process, can introduce you to the relevant research network and help get you involved in editorial review boards. If you don't have a PhD from such an institution, you may benefit from adopting a mentor. Do a post-doc at a school where someone can mentor you and try to get adopted while you are there. Or simply network closely with some senior people whose work you admire and which relates to yours (check the

bibliography of your dissertation to see who they might be) and flatter them into adopting you.

Be Visible at Conferences

Most core academic conferences in marketing (ACR, AMA and Marketing Science) generally take place in North America. You will HAVE to travel. (No one said this would be easy). And you will have to network while you are there. If you volunteer to organize a conference session, you can invite and get to know the colleagues who can help you in your career. You should attend key presentations, ask questions and (in private) show how your work links to the work you have heard. Build a network.

Gather Working Papers

If you wait until papers are published, you will be two years behind the field. Find out who is doing work that relates to yours. Ask for their working papers or drafts, and then comment (constructively) on them. You can then suggest collaborative follow up research.

Pre-test your Work

We counsel marketing practitioners to do market research and test market their products before introducing them. Such a process allows the product to be improved and reduces the rate of market failure. You should do the same with your research. Your research should start with a working paper, but you should circulate that paper both by mail and via the conference and seminar route, address comments and criticisms in redrafts, and then submit to a journal. Such a process may seem lengthy to eager young scholars, but it is actually a route to earlier publication, especially in top journals. If such a process means the difference between a reject and a "revision required" at a major journal, it can make a career's worth of difference.

Be Diplomatically Aggressive

When you are far from the centre, you must make more noise to gain attention. In addition to conference attendance, volunteer to do whatever is needed at professional conferences (chair sessions, organize sessions, arrange for key speakers, etc) and in professional societies (get involved with any of the many committees that are always short of folks willing to work). Volunteer to referee papers (either directly or through your "mentor") at top journals, indicating what

your areas of expertise are. In all you do, respond quickly, completely and professionally. It is better to decline an opportunity than to do a poor quality or tardy job; develop a reputation of professional diligence, and you will gain respect and professional recognition.

Travel

Once-a-year conferences are not enough. Go to all the conferences you can. Be sure that you use your sabbaticals and study leaves in a way that makes you and your capabilities well known to the core research community in your domain. And invite yourself to schools to give seminars while you are nearby.

Make Yourself Valuable

This point reinforces some of the issues I raised above: I encourage charity as enlightened self interest. Pick a niche (application domain/technology or methodology) and own it. Then share your expertise with others through research partnership and you both will win. Use your remote location to your advantage: initiate cross cultural research or replications of empirical work on your home domain. And go out of your way to be helpful to your international peers. While some say that no good deed goes unpunished (you will find the reward for that quick referee report you wrote is to get a new paper to review the following week), good professional deeds are rewarded in the long run with a strong, positive reputation, a necessary prerequisite for making a professional mark in the global arena.

It is clearly much more of a challenge to compete at the world level from a geographic location as far from the North American centre as Australia or New Zealand. The tips above will enhance your likelihood of achieving such success. Following those tips will also ensure that you have a global portfolio of friendships, as well as a large balance of frequent flier miles.

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