
SMA Innovative Teacher Comment

The Google Online Marketing Challenge: A Global Real-World Teaching and Learning Tool

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Introduction

The Google Online Marketing Challenge (the Challenge) is a global competition where student teams spend real money to run real advertising campaigns for real clients. The Challenge fits undergraduate or graduate classes such as advertising, ecommerce, marketing communications and marketing. A synthesis of hands-on advertising and education, the Challenge immerses students in the increasingly important field of online marketing, engages students with local businesses and enables teams to compete globally.

Marketing principles and Action Learning – peers meet regularly in structured sessions to discuss issues, test actions to solve problems, and critically reflect on outcomes – guide the Challenge pedagogy. Unlike simple group work, the Challenge promotes Action Learning by offering tailored support materials and evaluation guidelines. Furthermore, the Challenge is an ideal platform for synthesizing and discussing marketing techniques such as segmenting, targeting, metrics, industry analyses, ad copywriting, strategy and planning.

The Competition

Student teams receive US\$200 in advertising credits with AdWords, Google's flagship advertising product. The teams then recruit and work with a local business to devise an effective online marketing campaign. The groups outline a strategy, run a series of campaigns, and provide their business with recommendations to improve their online marketing.

The Challenge is not a computerized marketing simulation or a proposed marketing plan for a hypothetical business. Student teams develop and manage real online advertising campaigns for their clients and compete against teams from around the world.

Objectives

The Challenge has three objectives. The first is to provide students with an engaging and effective real-world task that prepares them as cutting-edge online marketers. The second objective is to connect the Higher Education community with local businesses. Students participating in the Challenge recruit and consult with businesses, offering online marketing advice and helping draw local businesses into the academic community. The third objective is to provide instructors with an interesting theory-based and commercially practical assessment item for their

students. Instructors also have an opportunity to develop online experiments using the AdWords platform, to enhance their research output and teaching effectiveness.

Evaluation Methods

Evaluating the 1600+ student teams from 47 countries in the Challenge incorporates a Pre-Campaign Strategy, a Post-Campaign Summary and Campaign Statistics.

For the *Pre-Campaign Strategy*, teams provide a client overview and propose an online advertising strategy with target audience settings, keyword examples, advertising copy and projected success metrics. The *Post-Campaign Summary* incorporates an Industry component and a Learning component. With both the Pre-Campaign Strategy and Post-Campaign Summary, student teams are also graded on communication and readability. The *Industry component* doubles as an assessment item and the teams share the results with their client. The *Learning component* has teams reflect on what they learned by covering learning objectives and outcomes, group dynamics and client dynamics and how their campaign strategy evolved.

Campaign Statistics – the computed component of the assessment – is a proprietary Google algorithm examining over 30 factors within a campaign including impressions, cost-per-click, click-through-rates, keyword choices, ad copy creativity and budgeting. Results from the Campaign Statistics determine the top five teams in each region (Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific). An independent academic judging panel then chooses regional and global winners based solely on the two written reports.

Benefits and Conclusions

There are myriad benefits to students, instructors, client businesses and schools. Students gain practical, real-world online marketing experience along with the excitement of participating in a global competition for the chance to visit Google's Headquarters in California. Students also get working knowledge of keyword marketing, a rapidly growing component of the advertising industry. Instructors get an effective teaching tool with full support materials including access to an online community of Challenge instructors. Businesses get free online advertising and marketing advice from student teams. Finally, schools get a dynamic learning opportunity for their students and goodwill with local businesses.

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