

Marketing “Governance” & “Marketing” Governance

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There are times as a marketing professional when you have to acknowledge stunning marketing brilliance. You see an organisation that knows its market, understands its customers completely and can deliver a product that almost universally satisfies the needs of the customers. It is strategic, professional and an embodiment of excellence. Well; hats off to the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

I recently (February 2015) attended the Alumni dinner for the graduates of the company directors course run by the Australian Institute of Company Directors. In every aspect I was impressed with my experience and most of my cohort share similar impressions. It was hard work and very time consuming with extensive reading required before each lecture. The course was expensive but worth every cent. The materials were excellent, the presenters engaging, the venue was more than appropriate and the assessment programme at the end was challenging.

There was absolutely no tokenism in the assessment. It was serious and it was very challenging.

Now some of that challenge has to do with how long since I have had to sit a formal assessment of this kind. But the reality is most of the pressure comes from the limits set around the assessment. You have to complete your assessment in a set amount of time following the completion of the last lecture. The only problem with that is that I had a lot of other projects running at the time – projects that I put off while I was undertaking my course and needed to be addressed immediately after. That means they needed addressing at the same time as I was meant to be undertaking my assessment.

The assessment consisted of an examination component and a major case study assignment component.

I probably over prepared for my examination. I studied and studied for this and that probably showed. I walked into the offices of the Australian Institute of Company Directors offices in Adelaide for my scheduled exam and left later that afternoon knowing that I absolutely aced it (to use the language of my school age children). Exams are the purest form of sport and I loved it!

The assignment was much more of a problem for me and that surprised me. I had undertaken a Masters degree by research in the 1990s and had produced a thesis that resulted in publications in learned journals including the prestigious Long Range Planning. Why would a simple 3000 word assignment be a problem? Again it came to limits. I had learnt so much and was provided a case study with so many facets to explore; I found it hard to decide what issues were the least important and therefore had to be excluded to come within the word limit.

So what was the net result? Certainly I think the assessment process forced me to learn (and I mean really learn) the course content. It has been committed to memory in a way that it wouldn't have

been if I had elected not to undertake the assessment. But in addition to this, I have a new found respect for all of my fellow alumni as graduates of the course. I know the depth of knowledge that they would have in the area of governance and really wouldn't be confident appointing a director in any business I was part of if they didn't have this qualification. In some ways, the rigorous nature of the course helps create demand in the expectations that graduate directors have in their fellow company directors.

This brings me to a few key observations.

First, it appears to me that the Company Directors qualification offered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors has become a bit of a pre-requisite for board appointments in leading organisations.

Second, it appears as though the Australian Institute of Company Directors is driving the discussion about governance best practice in Australia and as a result, academic research on the topic is integrated into the discussions of professional practitioners, represented by the Institute.

The third observation is perhaps the most important. As a result of the first two observations, it also appears that Australia is at the leading edge of world best in governance thinking and practice.

In these three observations, it appears as though the Australian Institute of Company Directors and the community of governance practitioners associated with it have executed an integrated and strategic marketing programme around governance that is worthy of closer inspection.

But the marketing community should not just look at the Company Directors qualification offered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors as a marketing case study. The marketing community should also look at how this key tool has brought a level of professionalism to a vocation that demands no formal pre-requisite qualifications.

I have been a member of the leading professional association for marketing professionals for over 20 years and in the profession for 29 years. To date we have implemented a number of initiatives to build the skill-level and professionalism of marketing in Australia but we have yet to achieve the unofficial pre-requisite expectations achieved in the areas of governance by the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Australia does not lead the world in marketing thinking. Australian marketing academics and marketing practitioners are less integrated than we could be.

Perhaps now is the time that the marketing profession needs to be more demanding of itself? Perhaps we need to start demanding more of ourselves, putting ourselves under more scrutiny, demanding closer integration of academics and practitioners – to put ourselves on the leading edge. Perhaps the marketing job done around formal governance has shown us that we need to put some formal governance around marketing?

I would like to encourage constructive discussion on this issue to help progress my profession. So please read this as a call to action – let's get a progressive discussion underway!