Real Money, Real Clients, Real Experience:
Using Google Ad Grants to Teach Online Marketing

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Introduction

Different from the traditional rote or didactic learning, experiential learning emphasizes a process of learning through reflection on doing (Felicia, 2011). Bringing the real-world marketing experience into the university classroom can be difficult for faculties as it requires many efforts on communicating with external clients for projects. Google started the Online Marketing Challenge (GOMC) competition in 2007, offering a unique opportunity for students to get real-world experience using the Google platform for digital marketing. After 10 years of implementation, Google suspended the original Google Online Marketing Challenge in 2017 and rebranded the challenge in 2018 called Google Ad Grants Online Marketing Challenge. The new challenge let students create and execute online marketing campaigns for real nonprofit organizations using a $10,000 USD monthly budget on Google search Ads. The goal of Google to fund this global academic program is to bring students and nonprofits together, to support digital skill development and drive positive impact around the world (Google, 2019).

Google Ad Grants--Online Marketing Challenge

Similar to the original GOMC, the challenge is open to all students who are enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs. Students must form teams of 2-5 members and register under a verified faculty member. One major difference between the new challenge and the original one is that it doesn't have a set-schedule for the challenge anymore. Instead, the project can be more flexible in terms of timeline as long as it works with the academic schedule. There are 10 steps to implementing the project in class (summarized from https://get.google.com/onlinechallenge/the-challenge/):

1. Professor registering for the Challenge.
2. Approved Professors access the Professor Dashboard to approve each Team Captain's registration.
3. Students passing the Google Ads Fundamentals Exam.
4. Requesting a Nonprofit Partner.
5. Connecting with the assigned Nonprofit Partner.
6. Accessing the Ad Grants Google Ads Account.
7. Developing, Presenting and Uploading your Pre-Campaign Marketing Strategy.
8. Running 4-Week Campaign.

9. Developing, Presenting and Uploading your Post-Campaign Analysis.
10. Nonprofit Feedback and Certificate of Recognition.

Implementation and Outcomes

The GOMC challenge project was implemented in a graduate-level digital marketing course taught in Spring, 2019. Google provided each student team a Google Ads advertising budget (up to $329/ day; $10,000/month) to help non-profit organizations promote their strategic goals. In the first month, the students were provided with online learning resources offered by the Google Academy for Ads. The students were required to obtain the certificate for the Google Ads Fundamentals Assessment. All the students enrolled in the class passed the certification exams. Canhoto & Murphy (2016) suggested that a superior experiential learning project can lead to students' deep learning, ensure engagement and develop employable skills. In this project, we were able to enhance deep learning through the following activities: (1) the students worked with their nonprofit Ad Grants clients to understand their causes, audience and goals, evaluate their existing campaign structure and performance, and develop a comprehensive digital marketing strategy. (2) the students received real-world responses for their campaigns via the detailed analytics on Google ads platform. (3) the students revise their action plans to improve the campaign performance base on the analytics and clients' responses. The action-feedback-correction loop remarkably supports the process for deep learning. In the post-campaign report, the students were asked to reflect on their original goals, the outcomes and recommendations to their clients. For *ensuring engagement*, students used Google Docs and Google Slides to work on their campaign report simultaneously and Google ads app to monitor their campaign performance during the campaign. The faculty also provided the teams guidance on the campaign via face-to-face consultant and weekly email communication. For *developing employable skills*, the students were able to practice their employable skills such as critical thinking, oral communication, time management, and analytical skills. Each student team member and their professor will receive a personalized Certificate of Completion recognizing the work and social impact. In sum, the experience the students gained from the course and the Google Ads certification will be valuable assets to their resume. For fashion merchandising and retail programs that emphasize on branding and entrepreneurship, the Google Ad Grants marketing challenge can be a promising pedagogy in bring in real-life experience to the university classrooms.

References

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