

ENGLISH FOR MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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Abstract. *This paper discusses the problems that arise when delivering English for Marketing Communications courses and offers new insights and practical solutions for this largely undiscovered area of ESP.*

Key words: *marketing communications, marketing, advertising, public relations, branding, corporate design, promotions, media, digital marketing, materials development, ESP course design*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on the following two cases of English for Marketing Communications courses. Case 1 is at tertiary level and Case 2 is an in-company training.

Case 1

Students attend an obligatory two semester English exam course (CEF B2) at tertiary level to gain credits towards a degree in Marketing Communications. These students are of mixed ability having studied English to different levels at school. A few have indeed spent time in English speaking countries. As the course progresses attendance drops dramatically. A number of students state they know enough English to pass the exam without doing boring grammar repetition and taking part in irrelevant discussions. Others say that the course does not help them to understand the specialist literature they need to read for other parts of their degree or that they just cannot see the point of English being an obligatory part of the degree as it will not be of use in their later careers. The lecturer assigned to the course goes through the motions but complains he finds it hard to generate interest or enthusiasm. The course is not the one he looks forward to teaching.

Case 2

A Business English trainer is given an assignment in an advertising agency. The training is for a weekly two-hour course with 'creatives' for a six month trial period. The trainer is very experienced and has both teaching and management qualifications. She feels confident although she is not overly sure. Over the six month period, she uses a variety of tried and tested business teaching materials that she feels are relevant and knows have been well received in other training environments. Towards the end of the six months, attendance becomes sporadic and the trainees often excuse themselves stating they have other work commitments. The HR department does not renew the training contract and remarks that although they appreciate the effort that has been made, they are desperate to find a trainer who truly understands 'those crazy people in advertising'.

Both cases demonstrate some of the problems that arise in designing an ESP business course for marketing communications. These problems are now analysed. In the following section, a number of solutions are presented. Findings are based on the on-going development of the English qualification for the degree in Communications and Media Management in the Business Studies faculty at the Fachhochschule (University of Applied Sciences) in Düsseldorf, Germany and the development of Business English training for the two largest global holding companies in marketing communications, WPP and Omnicom.

2. PROBLEMS

2.1. A brave new world

In both cases in the introduction, the specific needs of the marketing communications industry are not met. The students in case 1 complain the English part of their degree is irrelevant and the HR department in case 2 hints that the trainer does not understand the industry. Graduates in marketing communications would actually find it difficult today to develop a career that does *not* require English and advertisers spend their time working in global companies on global brands. It can be assumed from the two cases that neither the lecturer nor the trainer has real knowledge of the world the students and clients are actually involved in. Furthermore, the instructors have not sought to gain this knowledge.

One of the reasons for the emergence of the trend towards ESP (Hutchinson and Waters 1987) was the demands of a 'brave new world' in an 'age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale' in the post-war period. This in turn initiated a demand for an international language to address the specific needs of technology and commerce leading to a rise in specialist courses such as Aviation English, English for IT, Legal English and so on.

Marketing communications were undoubtedly a significant part of this post-war brave new world. Modern advertising, for instance, is said to have developed in a golden era in the 1950s and 1960s. The industry now covers a wide spectrum incorporating such areas as advertising, public relations, branding, corporate identity, corporate design, healthcare communications, direct marketing, digital marketing, promotions, market research, sports marketing, B2B marketing, media planning & buying, web site design and so on. This industry is undergoing unprecedented change today and exists in a new post-millennial 'brave new world'. This change can be examined from different perspectives including the structure of the industry, the use of products and technologies, the attitudes of consumers and the explosion in global brands.

The trend is towards massive global consolidation and the marketing communications industry is dominated by huge global holding companies. The so-called Big Four holding companies in this particular industry are presently, in order of size, WPP (headquarters in U.K.), Omnicom (headquarters in U.S.A.), Publicis (headquarters in France) and the Interpublic Group (headquarters in U.S.A.) whilst a concurrent trend is the growth of international agency networks headquartered in Asia. Today's global consumers share, discuss, create, operate in virtual worlds and have new ideas of ownership. New technologies (e.g. smart phones), new product models (e.g. car2go, netflix, ebooks) and social media (e.g. youtube, facebook) contribute to changing attitudes and consumers' greater freedom. Brands therefore seek to connect, inform, assist, gain approval and build relationships by being authentic and engaging, being involved in online communities and

responding to trends and fashion. Global brands have single global positioning with strong and consistent brand cultures which call for unified and cohesive marketing approaches. The language of this particular brave new world is unquestionably English.

2.2. Needs

Hutchinson and Waters cite a focus on the learners' needs as another significant reason for the emergence of ESP. Various sources state that an absolute characteristic of ESP is meeting the 'specific needs of the learner'. Additionally, Dudley Evans and St. John (1998) identify five key roles for the ESP practitioner which include 'researcher' and 'course designer and materials designer'.

Both the lecturer and trainer in cases 1 and 2 fail to focus on their learners' needs by relying on standard business English teaching materials and methodology. Finding suitable materials for marketing communications is problematic as published business English materials to date are largely unsuitable since they address themes that can be totally irrelevant to the marketing communications working environment, tackle marketing on a superficial level and/or demonstrate a lack of specialist knowledge. Bearing in mind the seismic shift in the industry in the post-millennial world and its huge demand for English, it is surprising that publishers have yet to respond. Nevertheless, both instructors in the above cases compound the materials problem by not researching the issues and procedures in marketing communications so that they can design courses and materials that focus on their learners' needs.

2.3. Motivation

Strevens (1988) identified four reasons for greater motivation in ESP courses - focus on learners' needs, relevance, success in imparting learning and cost-effectiveness. Hutchinson and Waters also argue that relevance and focus on learners' needs is fundamental in ESP but that 'the medicine of relevance may still need to be sweetened with the sugar of enjoyment, fun, creativity and a sense of achievement'.

Falling attendance in both cases 1 and 2 point to the lack of motivation. In case 1, the lecturer cannot generate interest and enthusiasm and students state the course is irrelevant. The lecturer 'goes through the motions' so the course is not 'sweetened' for either the lecturer or students. In case 2, the HR department believes the training is not cost-effective and does not make a further investment.

3. SOLUTIONS

3.1. Knowledge of the industry

Facing the first in-company training session with insights on the industry and the workings of an agency will at least spark a relevant discussion to create a platform for future development. A trainer that is new to marketing communications is thus advised to research the agency they are working for. What kind of agency is it? Does it deal with corporate design, classic advertising, digital campaigns or something else? What is the history of the agency? Who were the big players who played a role in building this history? What great campaigns has the agency created? What holding group does the agency belong to? Where are the headquarters? Who are the big players now? Who are the main clients? Has the agency won any awards?

Learning about how agencies are structured and the relationships between departments is also a beneficial first step. A classic advertising agency for instance will probably have departments with confusing names such as Creative, Accounts, Traffic and Production when Accounts has nothing to do with finance, Traffic nothing to do transport and Production nothing to do with assembly lines. Having a basic understanding of the functions of such departments in marketing communications will help a trainer prepare more relevant activities. To take an example, creative departments often consist of copywriters, art directors and creative directors who produce creative work and ideas. A learners' need in this context is to present creative work to clients. Accounts deal with client management and often liaise between the creative department and the client. A learners' need here is client negotiation. Traffic can be compared to project management and Production deals with print and film production. Each department had different learners' needs and its own jargon and vocabulary.

It should also be mentioned here that agencies also have more 'traditional' business departments such as Finance and HR. It would therefore be an error to prepare materials for the presentation of creative ideas for a group who work in Finance under the premise that these learners must be interested in talking about advertising when they actually have very little to do with the day to day production of advertising. Nevertheless, agencies are a special environment and trainers will find that those working in areas such as HR and Finance mostly have a personality type that fits the agency environment, i.e. a financial expert working at the Deutsche Bank will most likely be a different character to the one working at Saatchi and Saatchi.

Marketing communications work in a dynamic creative environment. Working in this field brings challenges but can be incredibly stimulating and rewarding. The professionals in the field are a great resource and the trainer can do research by asking questions, showing interest and responding. This is a recurring cycle as the trainer will be given access to more information and insights as the professional responds to the interest shown. Over time, a relationship of mutual trust and respect is built so that the trainer is more involved in the day to day work of the agency. This research can be supported by regularly reading specialist literature that can be found online. 'Marketing Week' (www.marketingweek.co.uk) and 'Adage' (www.adage.com) are both good examples that will keep a trainer updated on industry developments. In time, the trainer will be able to design more relevant materials and courses that are enjoyable, fun, creative and provide both sides with a sense of achievement. A day's work for an experienced trainer could range from leading a creative brainstorming session to helping to prepare a new business pitch presentation to teaching apprentices about campaign management to helping to explain German health marketing regulations to a new American client. It is tremendously exciting and a trainer can grow to love the environment.

This knowledge of the industry provides a strong foundation for any lecturer on a tertiary level course. Students appreciate the fact that their lecturer knows the industry and has many stories about agency life, experience of working on campaigns and knowledge of the specialist vocabulary. It is very difficult for students to reject content as irrelevant when the lecturer knows and can explain the relevance. Students become more motivated and their enthusiasm in turn generates more motivation from their lecturer. In addition, content in which the trends in industry are examined raises the interest level and awareness of the importance of English. The following exercise is an example of one that sparks a lively discussion:

- *Which advertising and media agencies have you heard of?*
- *When you read the articles about the current structure of the marketing communications industry on the next page, what are the consequences for you as a student of communications and media management?*

The articles give a run-down the Big Four holding groups, the structure of the industry and current trends introducing specialist company structure concepts and vocabulary.

3.2. Course design

The tertiary course for Communications and Media at the Fachhochschule (University of Applied Sciences) in Düsseldorf looked very much like the one presented in case 1 in the introduction five years ago. It has since been completely revamped in order to address the problems of relevance, needs and success in imparting knowledge as drivers of motivation. This course remodelling has involved research, course design and materials design shown in the following steps:

1. Initiation of dialogue with professors and lecturers teaching other sections of the degree with the aims of discovering what is taught and getting recommendations on academic marketing literature.
2. Initiation of a dialogue with students with the aims of getting feedback and establishing what is required from an English course.
3. Reading and assessment of literature recommended in Step 1 (dialogue and discovery) and assessment of student feedback in Step 2.
4. Design of a new course with 7 modules based on Step 3 (assessments) and hands-on experience in the industry.
5. Development of materials for these 7 modules.
6. Teaching of materials.
7. Initiation of dialogue with students to get further feedback.
8. Reassessment and updating of materials.

Steps 6 to 8 are cyclical.

9. Splitting of group into 2 annual courses with the aim of encouraging and supporting greater student interaction due to raising attendance. (Average yearly intake is approximately 50 students.)
10. Change of final exam assessment moving from 100% written to 50% written and 50% oral. Each student gives an individual 10 minute pitch presentation for the oral assessment.
11. A future planned measure is to invite guest speakers. These speakers will be professionals from the marketing communications industry and will give a short talk in English on an agreed subject.

Step 5 (development of materials) proved to be necessary due to a lack of relevant published materials which will be discussed further in this section. The rising attendance levels and increasing levels of interaction in Step 9 indicate increased motivation. An argument for cost-effectiveness can be made as agencies can employ graduates to work directly on client accounts in English without undertaking basic training.

The 7 modules that were designed in Step 4 (course design) are entitled:

- Brand Management
- Campaign Management
- Below-the-Line (viral marketing, guerilla marketing, event marketing)
- Market Research
- Promotions 1 (digital strategies, sales promotion, direct marketing, packaging)
- Promotions 2 (PR, corporate image, corporate identity, crisis management)
- Global Marketing

The case of 'Domos' a fictional global player in household cleaners, soaps and detergents is told throughout providing cohesion and practical application of theory. Students complete tasks, exercises and role plays for their client 'Domos' to mirror what happens in the real workplace. Students are taken from interpreting a client briefing through to creating a classic advertising campaign to creating a new corporate identity including email writing, meetings, negotiations and pitch presentation role plays.

To gain a greater insight into the content of each module, the example of the 11 steps in 'Campaign Management' can be outlined:

- a. provocative questions on the ethics of advertising,
- b. vocabulary and definitions matching exercise to introduce step c,
- c. analysis of a creative brief from 'Domos',
- d. analysis of advertising message strategies,
- e. analysis of executional frameworks in advertising,
- f. vocabulary of camera shots and angles,
- g. presentation of storyboards,
- h. student presentation of a TV campaign for 'Domos' bearing the creative brief from 'Domos' in Step c in mind,
- i. text analysis 'Effectiveness of a Advertising Campaign' (repositioning of global 'Domos' brand),
- j. vocabulary input and discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of using different media for the placement of advertising,
- k. writing of formal email to 'Domos' selling a social media campaign.

This content is relevant to the real context of agency life and highlights why current published materials raise issues that do not demonstrate understanding of the real context, procedures and functions. Steps d and e (analysis of advertising message strategies and executional frameworks) can be examined more closely here. An instructor who relies on published teaching materials would probably find a task in a chapter in published literature on 'marketing' or 'advertising' in which a picture of a print advertisement is shown together with questions such as:

- *What do you like about this advertisement?*
- *What makes this a good advertisement?*

The question of whether advertisers '*like*' an advertisement is actually largely irrelevant. Marketers need to present adverts that successfully fulfill a client's creative brief (step c) in order to sell ideas. Liking the ideas can help but is not essential. In fact, selling an idea that is not liked could be more relevant in some cases. Similarly, '*effective*' is a better adjective than '*good*' but effectiveness can only be understood by appreciating the importance of client briefing, campaign duration and consistency of message. So, the context is not taken into account.

The context can be broken down for understanding into the following procedure:

- client briefing
- message strategy
- executional framework
- creation - execution
- presentation of creative ideas to client
- production
- media placement

So, it is still possible to analyse a range of print advertisements but changing the questions gives a relevant context:

- *What message strategy is used in this advertisement?*
- *Is the strategy used effectively?*
- *What executional framework is used in this advertisement?*
- *Is the executional framework used effectively?*

To clarify, message strategy defines the message, how it should be conveyed and the tactic or approach to deliver the theme of the message. Some examples are:

- functional (emphasising Unique Selling Proposition)
- symbolic (making a psychological differentiation)
- emotional (joy, pride, fear)
- generic (making a brand synonymous with category)
- pre-emptive (making an assertion of superiority)
- comparative (e.g. Burger King v. McDonalds)
- Message strategies can be summarised as:
- cognitive strategy (rational and logical)
- conative strategy (direct response)
- affective strategy (emotions and feelings)

The message strategy can then be matched to the manner in which the strategy is presented. This is called the executional framework and some examples are:

- slice of life (eavesdropping on common experiences and giving solutions)
- testimonial
- authoritative (brand attributes given by expert)
- fantasy (make-believe)
- animation

The same materials can be used for in-company training by making small adaptations. For instance, campaign management is a typical subject area that an apprentice in marketing communications masters in the native language and is then trained to master in English. The campaign management content also provides scope for pitch presentations training which most agencies regard as the backbone to the business and a necessary training investment.

Taking Case 2 in the introduction, the content in the seven modules outlined above equally applies to experienced trainees. Interpreting client briefings, presenting message strategy, executional framework and storyboards is an ongoing work for such professionals who respond positively to materials that are truly relevant. Storyboards visually tell the story of an advertisement in an illustrated form panel by panel, a little like a comic book. Creatives prepare these storyboards to match the message strategy and executional framework and then use them to present their creative ideas to the client. The vocabulary that is required can stray into what is regarded as general English rather than business English as presenting storyboards involves describing physical attributes, relationships, emotions, dress, landscapes, indoor scenes, architecture, weather and so on as well as camera shots and angles. Creatives not only need vocabulary that can be outside the realm of what is considered business English but also to present their work with a degree of passion and enthusiasm to sell to clients. Training can start with analysing fictional work ('Domos') move on to work with real clients or even consider work from competitors.

It is such relevant training that is ‘sweetened with the sugar of enjoyment, fun, creativity’ and leaves both the trainer and the trainees feeling motivated with a sense of achievement.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To summarise, here are some tips for those who plan to work in marketing communications:

- read extensively
- talk to the professionals
- get to grips with the specialist vocabulary
- research the agency
- understand the structure and functions in an agency
- research what different kinds of agencies do
- be wary of using traditional business English materials on ‘marketing’ or ‘advertising’
- adapt business English materials (e.g. presentations and negotiations) to the agency context
- develop your own materials
- do not assume everyone in an agency wants to talk about advertising (e.g. HR and finance)
- learn what pitching is all about

The marketing communications industry is not a usual subject of discussion when it comes to Business English ESP so that the huge demand for English in this particular global industry remains largely untapped. Reasons for this include both a lack of published materials and a lack of instructors who truly understand agency life. Business English specialists cannot assume that materials are relevant to every industrial and commercial sector. There is a need to keep up to date with trends and what is actually happening in business to provide courses that are relevant and well-received. Both lecturers and students on tertiary level business ESP courses benefit when the lecturer has hands-on experience in the industry and has backed this with specific academic research. However, business English instructors cannot possibly be expected to be specialists in every business sector so that there is a definite question of whether Business English instructors need to consider specialising to find a specific ESP niche market in today’s world. There are indeed providers (e.g. aviation and legal English) who do this very successfully and lucratively. Marketing communications is certainly a niche market that holds enormous potential.

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