A Bit About Case Studies

Often, the best way to understand a marketing problem is to look at the successes and failures of real firms doing real marketing. Case studies allow us to review a scenario or situation that actually occurred and analyze both the problems faced by the managers of the firm and potential solutions. Case studies allow you, as a student of business in general and marketing specifically, to play the role of a manager in the firm and determine how you might address the scenario were you actually in charge.

Often, there will be more than one right answer, although some will be “more right” than others. In other studies, there will be no good outcomes – all the options have some negative impact on the firm. You may find yourself needing to make hard choices. We all dislike the option of firing staff or closing a factory, although that may be the best solution to the firm’s problems. While you are encouraged to always apply the principle of “doing well by doing good”, you are also expected to make the correct managerial decision.

Occasionally, the right decision is to do nothing. The firm is just fine and no action is required. This is rare as, in general, it defeats the purpose of an academic case study. Should you choose this option in your case analysis you must make an exceptionally strong case for doing so as managers rarely get paid for doing nothing.

As you may have learned in other classes, 90 percent of marketing is common sense and the same often applies to case studies. If your solution or analysis seems too complex—it probably is. The KISS principle is often the best principle. Always keep in mind that real people, not imaginary characters in your analysis, have to implement your solution.

There are a number of Web sites offering guidelines for case studies and you are strongly encouraged to explore them. Here’s one to get you started:

http://plato.acadiau.ca/courses/Busi/IntroBus/CASEMETHOD.html

I. Format

- 4-5 pages exclusive of cover, abstract and reference pages (total of approximately 8-9 pages)
- Pages must be numbered
- Tables, charts, graphs and images are all welcome but are NOT included in the page total (although they will frequently contribute to a good grade!)
- Cover page must be APA compliant
- Separate abstract page
- Separate reference page
- 12 point Times Roman font
- Double spaced with 1” margins

The use of headers and sub-headers is strongly suggested
II. Submission

1. Submit to TurnItIn via eCollege

III. Cover page

You must use an APA cover page. You will find an example at the end of these instructions

IV. Abstract

Your abstract must be on a separate page and should be a summary of your paper. Typically, your abstract will be a long paragraph in length.

V. Body

This should be about 4-5 pages in length (minimum – this is only a guideline)

a) Case Background

In 3-4 paragraphs describe the case facts and background. This should include BRIEF information about the firm, however do NOT simply duplicate what is in the case itself. As things change quickly in business, you may wish to check the current status of the firm and briefly discuss the most current information.

b). Key Issues

What are the key marketing or business issues in the case? These might be problems, opportunities or challenges the firm is facing. For example:

- Sales have declined by 10 percent in the last year.
- The competition has launched a new and innovative product.
- Consumer tastes have changed and the firm’s most successful product is at risk.

Typically, there will be 2-4 of these and you should briefly describe each. You may wish to cite information from the case to support your contention that these are key issues. You will need to consider if the issues are independent or interdependent. If the former, you may treat the solutions as important to that issue alone. If the issues are interdependent, you may need to consider how the solutions you describe below impact more than one issue or problem.

c) Analysis of Alternative Solutions.

For the issues you identified above, you must identify potential solutions and analyze each of them. For example, for the decline in sales noted above we might try any of the following, among other options:
1. increase advertising
2. develop a new product
3. change distribution or retailers
4. launch a brand awareness campaign

For each of the alternatives, you should analyze the costs, benefits, resources required and possible outcomes. Typically, you will have 3-4 of these alternatives. Any given alternative solution might address multiple issues. If this is the case be sure to so note in your narrative.

In your analysis consider tools such as SWOT, breakeven analysis, market research and other marketing tools.

Typically, this will be the longest and most detailed portion of your case analysis.

d) Recommendations
1. Rank your options
Begin by rank ordering your alternatives from most to least desirable. In a sentence or two explain the rank you have assigned each alternative solution. Be sure to consider if the alternative solutions help resolve more than a single issue. You should also consider which issues are critical to the firm’s success and which are peripheral or less important.

2. Select and implement your preferred solution
This is the most important part of your case analysis.

Begin by selecting the solution that you believe will best solve the issues or problems you have identified.

Describe in detail WHY you have selected your given solution. Make sure that when supporting your preferred solution your arguments are consistent with the analysis you conducted above. Be very organized and methodical in your recommendations and do not “beat around the bush”. Pick a solution and support that decision with facts and sound reasoning. NOTE – you may combine more than one solution but in doing so you must support BOTH and justify the expense.

VI. Conclusion – Lesson Learned
What is the most important take-away or lesson learned from this case? Be specific and describe why you selected this particular “lesson”.

VII. References.

You must include a separate page listing your references in APA format. If you need help with APA try the OWL Purdue University Web site

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

You must have three references other than the text, course slides or other course materials, as follows:

- ONE reference from a peer reviewed academic journal or paper
- ONE reference from an online source – NO Wikipedia or similar sources. In some cases blogs may be acceptable.

Proquest is a good source for finding articles; see "Using ProQuest for Your Case Study References" in Doc Sharing.

GRADING GUIDELINES

In addition to the grading rubric below the following specific deductions will apply:

Missing or incorrect cover page – 10 point deduction
Missing or inaccurate references or citations – 10 point deduction for each
Not having a separate page for references – 5 point deduction
Not formatted per instructions – 10 point deduction
Missing Abstract – 10 point deduction (partial deduction for short or poorly organized abstract)
Missing page numbers – 5 point deduction

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**THIRD PARTY CONTENT**
As with any academic assignment you may use third party content on a limited basis to support your arguments and conclusions. The guideline for this case analysis is approximately 15 percent of your paper may be direct quotes or content from your sources. All such quotes or content MUST be cited in APA format.

Saint Leo Honor Code applies to cheating, copying or plagiarism.
THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXAMPLE OF AN APA COVER PAGE

Running Head : The name of your paper

The Name of Your Paper

Sub name if any

Paper Type (marketing plan, case analysis, thesis)

Your Name

Your School Name
Abstract

Your abstract follows your cover page and is typically a paragraph in length. It is a brief summary of your analysis.
BEGIN THE BODY OF YOUR PAPER ON THE PAGE FOLLOWING THE ABSTRACT
References

End your paper with your references listed in APA format on a separate page.