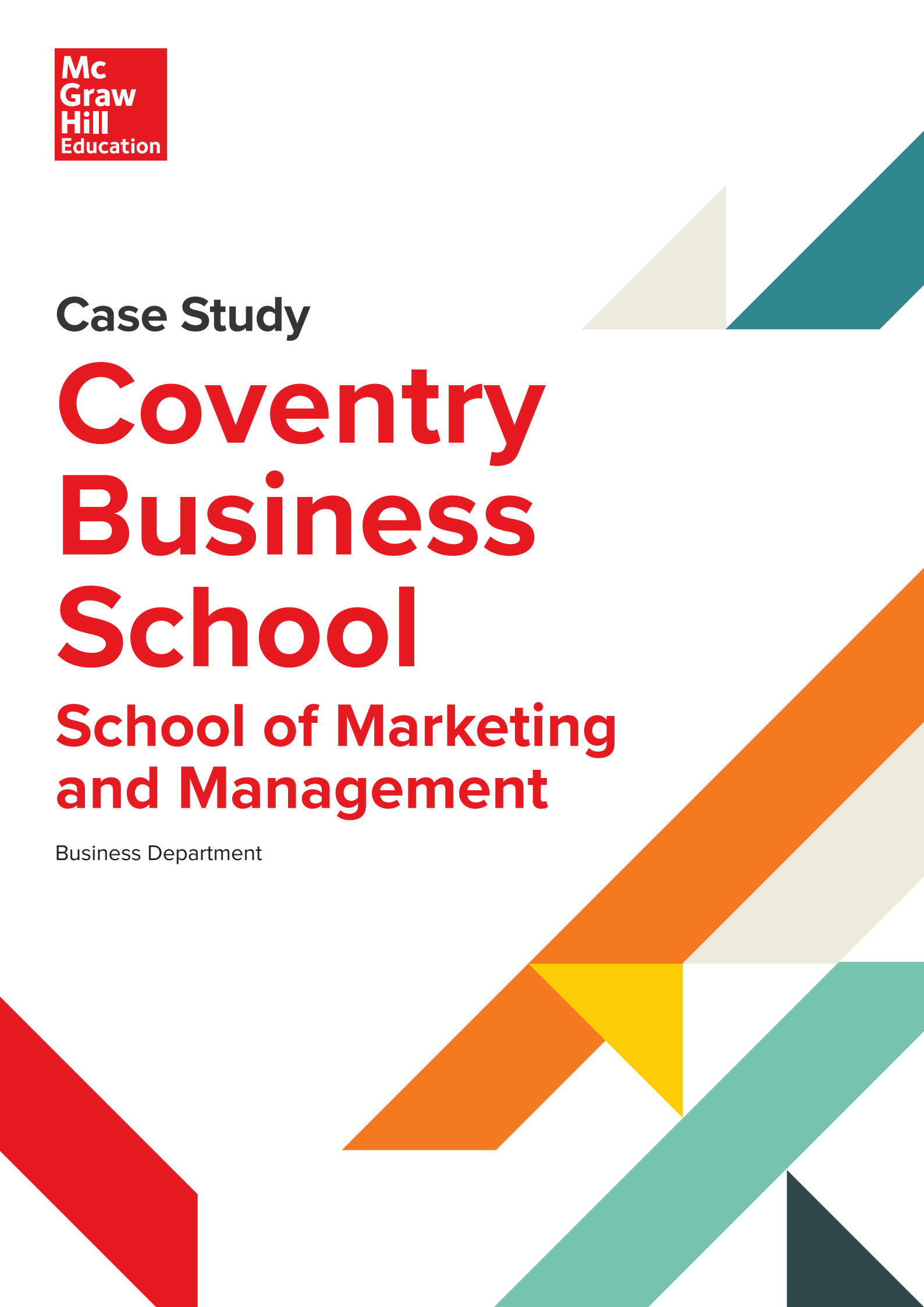


Case Study

Coventry Business School

**School of Marketing
and Management**

Business Department



About Coventry Business School

School of Marketing and Management

Coventry has a long tradition in business education, with successful graduates from the last four decades in high profile positions worldwide. Their courses are explicitly designed to be challenging and thought-provoking and to provide students with a modern, forward-thinking education, that prepares them for future employment and enhances their career prospects. The development of skills, competencies and understanding, necessary in its contribution to the rapidly changing work environment, are all supported by our own dedicated Employment Unit located within the Business Futures department. Every student within the Faculty has a designated Employment Personal Tutor (EPT), aligned to their area of study, to work with them throughout their course. The school was awarded Gold for outstanding teaching and learning by the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and was rated 2nd in UK for Teaching Excellence (TEF) in the Times Higher Education metrics ranking 2017.

Case Study Facts

Instructor/s:

Ian Webster

Course:

Sport Marketing and Event Management

Digital Product in Use:

MH Practice Marketing®

Number of Students:

78 students

The Story

Staff at Coventry were acutely aware of the changing needs and requirements of a highly competitive global work environment. Recognising that practical experience and the application of theory are essential for employability, courses at the school have been evolving over the past few years to maximise opportunities for students to gain employability skills and be assessed on their ability to apply learning, over and above their ability to recall knowledge for essays and written exams. At the same time, as digital literacy is becoming an inseparable workplace skill regardless of subject discipline, the school has been looking for ways to bring more and more of this into their course offering.

In short, courses start with the needs of the employer. As Senior Lecturer, Ian Webster, puts it: "We don't want industry to look into us. We ask, what kind of skills do they want? How can we make our students more employable? How can we make them stand out at interviews? When students are paying large sums for their degree, it's imperative that we send them out with the skills they need to thrive in the future." This has led to real innovation in course design, with students given the opportunity to gain real-life experience in a wide range of contexts; volunteering and work-experience (often overseas) built in as mandatory parts of the programme, as well as opportunities to showcase their talents and skills, building a portfolio that they can take to interview for first jobs.

The Solution

In this vein, McGraw-Hill Education's Practice Marketing software has been a key part of final year study for Sport Marketing and Event Management students for three years now. This multiplayer simulation game requires students to successfully launch a new product to market (a backpack of their own design) using the "4 Ps" of marketing: Product, Price, Placement, and Promotion. It offers students the chance to apply the theory they have learned during their first two years of study to a real-life scenario. Having looked around at various options, Ian was particularly drawn to the McGraw-Hill Education product by the sophisticated algorithms built into the software, allowing teams to compete against one another, so that students have to adapt their 4 Ps to the competitive environment, just as they would in real life.

The Practice Marketing coursework project is split into two elements of equal value. The first is the simulation itself. For this, students work in teams over 10 weeks to complete the simulation. Students are judged not only on net profit but on several different metrics – market share, return on marketing investment, customer satisfaction, revenue and units sold. The second part is a reflective piece of writing, enabling students to critically evaluate the team's decisions during the task and to demonstrate what they have learned from it – from a marketing strategy/ management perspective (lessons regarding cashflow, consistency of brand and so on), but also looking at things like Belbin's team roles. This element of the evaluation assesses

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personal qualities as much as subject understanding. Webster remarks that when it comes to the simulation the ultimate winners are not necessarily those who were first out of the starting block. Contemplation and strategic reaction to changes in the commercial environment are what counts. As the simulation progresses, Ian throws in curve ball scenarios that force students to do this – perhaps changes in material prices, or the cost of promotion – making the task challenging and rigorous to get the best out of students. As one student responded in the course evaluation: “When it came to competing against the others, it was very difficult to find a successful strategy with a positive outcome for your organisation. It made you double think your strategic decisions and to critically analyse each segment to see which best suited your profit goals.”

The practicalities

While the programme is designed to be intuitive and as easy to use as possible, students massively benefit from familiarising themselves with the programme and playing around with it in advance of the assessed simulation. McGraw-Hill Education consultant, Gemma, makes herself available to present the software to students during the first session of the module, and students are offered training on how to use the system. There is also a virtual assistant built-in to the programme offering specialist tutorials, and Ian remarks that the students who listen to this are often the ones who do well. The software can be used on all devices so no-one has difficulty accessing it, and for the inevitable occasions that students forget their passwords, McGraw-Hill Education are quick at getting back to them.

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The results

Students are all very enthused by the programme, and the module evaluations show extremely high satisfaction rates, with over 96.8% of respondents agreeing that the module is intellectually stimulating, and the simulation coming up time and time again in students' lists of top 3 things they think are good about the module. Attendance at these seminars is among the highest for any of their undergraduate modules, and the average mark for the course is higher than other final year modules, reflecting the enthusiasm and engagement of the students.

What really comes through is the students' capacity for self-reflection – so very important for crucial workplace skills like adaptability and a drive for self-improvement:

“At the beginning I found the game very difficult to comprehend. With a lot of practice I was able to finally grasp the concept of the game. I found it very useful applying my knowledge of the 4 Ps and market analysis to a ‘real life’ scenario. I would recommend this game with a strong emphasis to practice before.”

“If I was to play the game again I would have taken more time when it came to analysing the outcome from each turn and what was needed to be done to be more successful within the next turn.”

The Business school is so impressed with Practice Marketing that they are now considering using it for second year students as well, and the University is looking at using it for vocational courses in their FE arm Coventry University College, and for post-graduate online degrees.