



[by Carmen Maria Sanchez, Princeton University]

According to the American Marketing Association, “marketing” is “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” Judging from this description, being a marketer sounds like being Superman, except in this case you have to do the impossible without even taking off your tie. What kind of training can prepare you to simultaneously create, communicate, deliver, exchange, and enrich in the name of society at large while still wearing the clothes of a real-life human being?

Fortunately, the advertising industry’s real-life leaders don’t subscribe to the AMA job description. “It’s too academic,” said Bob Seelert, CEO of Clio Award-winning global marketing firm Saatchi and Saatchi. His job, he explained, goes beyond the scope of technical definition.

To future college graduates, Bob’s statement is no more comforting than the prospect of fighting Superman for a job on Planet Krypton. The fact is that today’s aspiring professionals like definitions. In what most students continue to perceive as a uncertain job market, it’s nice to read a job description that you can break down into a manageable list of “to do’s.” Career services departments at colleges throughout the

nation promise ‘training and preparation’ for the real world by offering leadership workshops, practice interviews, public speaking classes — all jam-packed with concrete-sounding formulas which, if conscientiously applied, will equal a job offer. Students are told that when armed with a “five-minute elevator speech,” they will survive successive networking rounds with I-bank executives. Computer science majors aiming to land a job at the Googleplex are told they should make sure C, C++, Java, and Python appear on their resume. Econ majors should practice with Stata before applying for a ‘quant’ position at a hedge fund. All these elements are portrayed by career services as part of a tangible toolbox. All these tools are well defined and obtainable through academic learning, be it an intro computing course, or a series of Stata tutorials, or a “How to Speak Persuasively and Honestly” workshop. Learning C++ is not easy, but at least it is a task that students can treat as a concrete assignment, with the knowledge (or is it an assumption?) that once they scratch “learn C++” from their “to do” list, they will be one step closer to post-college security. Again, we students, who are used to completing assignments with concrete instructions, like definitions when it comes to finding a job.

But what class or workshop can prepare you for Bob Seelert’s job? According

to the Saatchi and Saatchi website, the company’s primary goal is to “fill the world with Lovemarks.” “Lovemarks” isn’t in the dictionary; I’ve checked. At Ogilvy, another first-class global communications firm, the function of advertisers is “sell, or else.” At Young and Rubicam, yet another leader in the industry, the aim is to “resist the usual in order to create brands that are irresistible.” Nowhere in these job descriptions are there instructions as to how, with what tools, in what tone, in what kind of suit, marketing should be done. Such lack of specificity can be interpreted as a way to promote independent thought in the workplace, but what college senior is thinking about thinking independently in an office into which they haven’t yet been accepted?

This is not to suggest that students shouldn’t bother with jobs in marketing. In fact, it’s surprising we aren’t scrambling to get recruited by firms like Saatchi and Ogilvy. Let’s think critically. A) Is there money to be made in this industry? Certainly. After all, don’t most companies in the world spend most of their money paying for advertising? Google, for instance, spent 9% of its 2008 revenue on sales and marketing services, about \$2 million. Multiply \$2 million by the hundreds of clients that a well-reputed advertising company serves on a daily basis, and you start to get the picture. In 2008, when countless companies across the globe

were suffering from widespread economic recession, Saatchi and Saatchi pulled in yearly earnings just under \$7 billion. B) Do I need a graduate degree for this industry? Nope. Unlike students who must come to terms with the prospect of paying for five years of medical school before earning a residency position at a respectable hospital, students who want to operate on “Lovemarks” can apply directly after college and dive directly into the profession. Though Mr. Seelert attended business school, today he asserts that the skills needed to be a marketer are learned through persistent curiosity about the people and ideas that circulate outside the campus. C) Do I have to stay in one place to work in this industry? Hardly. Young and Rubicam has offices from Manila to Budapest to Dubai to New York to

Mexico City. If your job consists of building brands “irresistible” to an increasingly heterogeneous global pool of consumers, the prospect of travelling internationally at some point in your career is an inch short of certain.

Okay, that’s all tempting, but we are still missing the formula that will get us an “A” on a marketing job application. Why aim for a job destination that you can’t type into Mapquest, when you can take defined steps toward other high-salary, high-prestige positions? Most career services departments do not offer “Making Lovemarks 101,” nor can any single workshop prepare us to meet the mouthful of functions described by the American Marketing Association.

But maybe missing specific instructions for the marketing industry can help us get a

hold on the fundamentals of success in the professional world at large. Maybe juggling too many instructions is blinding us in the face of what we already know is the key to finding a job we like and a job we are good at. What really matters, leaders of the marketing industry remind us, is thinking and working outside the toolbox you are given by academics. Whether you envision yourself trading stock options, designing Google’s next operating system, or building an architectural model for an eco-friendly New York City sky-scraper, do not forget that the really successful professionals—the ones that stand out—stand out precisely because they didn’t stick to a formula and strived to be Superman, even when career services told them that only Kryptonites could apply. **BT**