

Learning Sports and Entertainment Marketing— “APPRENTICE” Style

By Jon Weidlich



“YOU’RE FIRED!”

These two words were made a catchphrase by Donald Trump on the network television show “The Apprentice.” While students in Mark Steedly’s sports and entertainment marketing class at Winton Woods High School near Cincinnati may not hear those words from Mr. Trump himself, they are required to tackle a series of rigorous tasks that would make The Donald proud. The sports and entertainment marketing program is a satellite program of Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development in Cincinnati. Held in two area school districts, at Winton Woods High School and North College Hill High School, sports and entertainment marketing has been a popular choice for students for more than a decade.

The tasks start out simply but increase in scope and skill. Each task is designed for students to use and demonstrate the marketing concepts that they’re learning throughout the program. Area sports marketing professionals and businesspeople help to develop projects that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and creativity. Students compete against each other, and every task requires the students to discuss and defend their results. Through the competition, every member of the class works directly on real-world problems and issues, and through sharing their results, each student understands a variety of ways to tackle each issue.

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The Tasks

- In 2006-2007, teams of students—boys vs. girls—competed to see who could raise more money selling fundraising cards from a local pizza chain. Profits from the sale helped defray costs of state and international DECA competitions.
- Jay Blumberg, CEO of the marketing company The Deciding Factor, introduced mobile marketing to the class. Students were tasked with explaining how automated phoning could increase sales for a company and they had to produce an analysis.
- Students met with Ben Huffman, sports marketing director for the Warren County (Ohio) Convention and Visitors Bureau. He had students prepare a bid for hosting the Nike Memorial Day Girls Basketball Tournament. They had to prepare a comprehensive plan taking into account every element from the event logo to volunteer assistance to a VIP speaker for the opening ceremony.
- Students were asked to create cinema advertising that reinforced the brand image of Great Oaks. Presentations were judged by Great Oaks administrators, and the winning entry “It’s never too late, if the choice is GREAT” was the result of student research of both the school district and the target market.

- Working with marketing product managers from Procter and Gamble (P&G) led to the final and most rigorous task. By this time, six students were left in the competition. Each student was assigned a P&G product, and had to create an advertising package for the product. Students developed a script, storyboard, jingle, television commercial, and an advertising campaign. In the end two P&G staffers picked a winner—Josh Stricker, who earned the title of The Sports Marketing Apprentice III.

It’s not all fun and games, though; the Apprentice game is only a small part of a comprehensive program and a curriculum that teaches fundamental business and marketing concepts such as economics, business ethics, business law and professional development. Steedly says his students continue to rise to the occasion.

“This program has always had a strong enrollment and a history of pulling in the upper level students—those who are leaders in their school. It’s the place to be.” In 2008-2009, his sports and entertainment marketing students will include the students ranked first through fifth in their class. ■

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