

Hype Tech: How Online MBA Grads Can Stir Up Crowds--and Profits

Education Zone : Online Degrees, Distance Learning, College Degree Program, MBA Program

Your portal to degree programs, career information, school reviews, and education news

by Gabby Hyman

When a May 2007 study by Strategy Analytics found that 90 percent of cellphone owners rated the new Apple iPhone superior to their current mobile devices, market analysts were astounded. Why? Because the survey was completed two months before the iPhone went on sale! The marketing gurus at Apple had, once again, created a hype flurry that triggered insatiable hunger for a product that consumers could only dream about holding in their hands.

Students lining up for online marketing courses or MBA degree programs would do well to learn from Apple's co-founder and virtuoso of hype, Steven Jobs. Jobs (who just happens to be on Disney's board of directors) knows how to sell pricey chip-driven devices to young consumers as if they were one buck candy bars for children.

Remember the 1984 Super Bowl commercial that revolutionized the way Apple sold computers? What's the difference between patron lines snaking around the block to see Star Wars or to buy a new gadget? When Hollywood-style marketing meets high tech, the result is hype tech.

"Jobs is a showman who creates an aura about his products that defies marketing," 40-year marketing veteran Peter Sealey told *The San Francisco Chronicle*. "You can't buy the kind of marketing he gets. He brings the best of Hollywood to a superb array of consumer electronics and he does it with élan and skill. He's the best in the world at doing that, bar none."

Apple sold 270,000 of the new iPhones in the first 30 hours.

Tracking the Master of Marketing

Late in 2006, *IT Wire* was already reporting that, "somehow Apple has managed to convince the public (that it can create a mobile with iPod music capabilities) without spending one cent on overt marketing and even admitting that it is going into the cell phone business. That in itself could be the subject of a market post-graduate thesis." And still, at this point, no one had seen a prototype, much less the phone.

Tease, tease, tease. Jobs' first overt marketing ploy was to yank an iPhone prototype from his pocket at the January 2007 MacWorld Conference and Expo, telling astonished onlookers that he expected to sell 10 million of the new devices by next year. It mirrored the way Hollywood filmmakers market a horror movie--flash the creature on the screen, but don't let anyone get a good look at it.

Jobs' January performance wasn't the first time hype tech had married marketing strategies to a pop-culture model. When Windows 95 debuted, it did so to the soundtrack of the Rolling Stones "Start Me Up." Then, Microsoft founder Bill Gates demonstrated the software on the *Tonight Show*.

Tickle-Me Marketing Tactics

Consequently, following his January sneak-peek, Jobs carefully planned a series of consumer snap glimpses of the iPhone at trade shows. Then, announcing a limited initial release, Jobs followed a long-established marketing ploy of suggesting a pending shortage of a desperately needed product. Think how the public went insane on Christmas 1996 when it was announced that there would be a shortage of Tickle-Me Elmo dolls. One the first shopping day, a clerk was injured when hundreds of crazed consumers burst into a toy store.

By May 2007, Time Magazine named Jobs among the "100 Most Influential People in The World." More buzz for the iPhone.

By July 20, marketing media surveyors Blackfriars Communications reported that iPhone news stories surpassed 19,490, outstripping the media hype for the latest Harry Potter book by 6,000 stories.

Just before the sale date, iPhone partner AT&T announced that it was hiring security to handle lines at the activation stores across the county. Rioting consumers? Don't be confused. The security announcement released to the media was all part of the marketing ploy.

Less than a week before Apple stores sold the first unit, high-tech writer Mike McGuire told Fox News that Apple fans--in and of themselves--were the ones who really escalated the frenzy, speculating with unchecked relish on message boards and through volleys of emails, raising the pre-sales status of the iPhone to proportions "somewhere between electricity and sliced bread."

Professionals Strike at the Market

It doesn't take an MBA or even a bachelor's degree in marketing to realize that a promotional genius was set loose on a gadget-hungry nation. It's called viral marketing, and Jobs created an epidemic.

Marketing pros around the country borrow Job's model with varying degrees of success. Mavens and neophytes alike enroll in online MBA and marketing degree programs to master the techniques that drive today's hype tech. And their work often pays dividends. The U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts employment of advertising, marketing, and promotions professionals is expected to increase 18 to 26 percent through 2014.