

# INTERACTIVE ADVERTISING CONCENTRATION: A FIRST ATTEMPT

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**ABSTRACT:** The University of Texas Advertising Department introduced its first Internet advertising class in 1995. That class quickly became quite popular with students, and it helped them to find jobs in the quickly expanding market for Internet-related occupations. Since that time the Advertising Department has expanded its course offerings in this area, but with little coordination or unified goal. Beginning in Fall 2000, however, the Department is instituting an Interactive Advertising "concentration." It appears to be the first such concentration in the U.S. This article describes the process that led to this innovation, the major considerations that went into its design, and the initial make-up of that concentration.

Internet advertising is "for real." What amounted to barely a dream in 1990 had blossomed into an estimated \$5.25 billion in 2000, with projections reaching as much as \$45.5 billion per year by 2005. To put this into perspective, network and cable television together are expected to account for \$43 billion in that same year. [1] Indeed, in its first decade as an advertising medium, the Internet became a major dish on the adperson's menu, and a driving force that has invigorated the entire marketing communications industry. Though the real numbers are subject to speculation, the Internet has greatly expanded the volume and variety of jobs available to students trained in advertising and related fields. And there is no reason to believe that it will become a lesser force in the future.

As part of the field's permanent landscape, and one of escalating importance, the need to integrate Internet advertising into a university advertising curriculum becomes inescapable. The pedagogical question, though, is how best to present this new and evolving technology to students. In particular, we must decide whether to integrate instruction about the Internet into pre-existing courses, or present it as an isolated subject in a new course.

## Integration vs. Isolation

On the one hand, the Internet is a new medium. It *could* be treated much as we treat other media. When television first was embraced as an outlet for advertising, it was rather common for university ad programs to offer a separate course dedicated to this new medium. It was, after all, a wholly new approach to advertising, with unique characteristics and uses, and it quickly was becoming an incredibly important option for advertisers. It seemed to deserve its own class. But over time, classes solely concerned with television advertising disappeared as discussions of this medium became integrated into other courses. It seems logical that over time, like

television, the Internet will be a part of almost every advertising course and will not have its own dedicated course.

At the same time, the Internet is much more than just a medium. It is at one time a confluence of all media, a new breed of medium, a mixture of virtually all forms of marketing communication, and even a distribution channel. But perhaps most important from an advertising perspective, it represents the first widely adopted two-way form of advertising communication. For the first time in the history of advertising, we must consider the consequences of speaking to consumers who can easily speak back to us. This certainly can justify treating the Internet as a unique and severable topic.

These different perspectives have allowed schools to take different, yet entirely justifiable, approaches to teaching students about Internet advertising. In some, or many, cases schools have opted to integrate Internet issues into other courses, though, for reasons other than philosophical leaning. Rather, they may choose integration because limited resources prevent them from offering additional courses. Funding and manpower limitations are a major obstacle to presenting Internet advertising as a separate, isolated, course topic, even if faculty are convinced this is the pedagogically superior approach.

As one of the largest programs in the United States, the University of Texas Advertising Department already offered more courses than most smaller programs, lending it some flexibility to divert resources from one class to another. But even so, like those other programs this Department was faced with finite resources and needed to address Internet advertising instruction with deliberation, to find an academically palatable method that was fiscally efficient. What follows is a description of how this Advertising Department chose to approach this problem, culminating in the creation of an academic "concentration" in Interactive Advertising.

## The Texas Approach

Sometime before 1995, faculty of the Advertising Department recognized a need to make the Internet, and eventually other interactive media, a part of the advertising program. Although a few advertising instructors had begun to integrate some aspect of the Internet into their classes [2], and a few non-advertising classes around the country had been developed specifically to cope with the Internet as an information source [3], at that time no distinct advertising-oriented Internet class had yet been offered anywhere in the United States. Over the succeeding five years the Department took several steps to bridge this gap, but probably the most important was the faculty's deliberation over the most fundamental issue: how best to approach this goal.

## Integration AND Isolation

As in other advertising programs, the Department's faculty faced the basic decision of whether to integrate Internet advertising into pre-existing courses or set it out as a separate topic. The faculty agreed there is a strong possibility this topic eventually will be a part of every other advertising course, and felt that creating a separate Internet class might be misdirected. It might make more sense to create the model that will be followed in the long run, rather than following the same detour that was taken regarding television advertising.

It also was recognized that many students are interested in taking classes specifically focussed on this new technology. But perhaps more important, many employers are seeking to hire graduates with course content centered around the Internet. [4] In short, dedicated Internet courses are marketable. This has become more and more obvious recently, as students entering Internet-related advertising jobs are commanding salaries double and triple those of their non-Internet-savvy peers. Given that reality, the faculty decided those advantages provided more than sufficient justification for offering a separate Internet course, even if that subject matter would, in the more distant future, be integrated into a variety of other courses.

At the same time it was obvious that some integration should take place immediately. Even those students who have no desire to specialize in online advertising need some basic understanding of, and appreciation for, the Internet and its role in marketing communication, just as they must know where radio and television can fit into an advertising plan. On top of that, the Internet now holds a valued position for internal communications within companies, and facilitates

communication and research outside an employee's company. Consequently, the faculty of Advertising at the University of Texas decided this topic must be addressed on multiple fronts. The measures taken over this five year period can be summarized as falling into six steps, each moving students toward greater involvement with the Internet and Internet advertising:

1. Acclimation
2. Integration
3. Understanding
4. Depth
5. Concentrations
6. Placement

Those steps are briefly discussed below.

### Step One: Acclimation

As the advertising environment changes, students must be equipped with sufficient knowledge and ability to deal with those changes. All advertising students, therefore, must be unafraid of this technology and, ideally, should feel comfortable using it. Although today students often are comfortable with this medium, efforts to acclimate them to the interactive environment may actually have begun a bit earlier than 1995, when the Internet still was new to the vast majority of students.

Several methods were used to encourage this acclimation process. For example, one of the first courses in the sequence of courses required for an advertising degree, Introduction to Creativity, was among the first to mandate that students submit certain assignments via electronic mail. Over time, other courses adopted this concept, such that many classes now use this method for assignment submission.

Additionally, faculty began putting course materials online. Syllabi and readings were made available on the Internet. In some cases the same materials were offered to students in both hard copy and electronically, but in others they could be accessed only via the Internet. Indeed, a few faculty created an extensive Web presence for a course or set of courses, with Media Planning being one of the first of this type.

Some faculty also placed supplementary readings and resources online. These often were not required readings, but provided students with sufficient initiative to find information that could give them an advantage in the classroom or on the job market. One of my own early efforts in this regard

presented students with list of resume preparation and other job hunting tips.

Many classes likewise began allowing or requiring students to do research using the Internet as a research tool. This included both secondary and primary research. The Advertising World site was created largely as a portal through which students could find their way to any advertising information extant on the Internet. Not long after that, a variety of research resources were placed online to assist students and further encourage them to use the Internet as an information-gathering tool. This was especially valuable in the earlier years, before libraries and other providers offered much depth of content on Web sites.

As time passed, of course, it became much more common for students to turn to the Internet for information. Today the goal of acclimation seems to have been achieved. Virtually simultaneous with those actions, the faculty began the process of integration.

**Step Two: Integration**

It was obvious almost from the beginning of commerce on the Internet that this represented a new and important medium for advertising. The faculty's recognition of that fact can be seen in its 1995 white paper on The Future of Advertising. As such, it would be impossible to teach most advertising courses without mentioning this medium. No Media Planning class, for instance, would be complete without spending at least a portion of the class talking about the Internet. Creative courses, too, required some new lecture material and thought to accommodate this wholly new creative canvas. Legal and ethical considerations, too, needed to expand to encompass concerns that were not a part of the conventional advertising landscape, such as privacy. [5]

Advertising has been predominantly one-way communication, until the advent of the Internet. So virtually every course needed to be re-examined in light of the potential for multi-way communication. Nowhere was this more important than in courses dealing with theories of advertising communication. So in a graduate Theories course, students developed their own websites as a way to gain better understanding of this new communicative dimension.

Over time, nearly every course in the advertising program integrated some discussion or treatment of Internet-related issues. These topics also became integrated into student and faculty research projects, as many of them attempted to grasp a

better understanding of how the Internet would change this profession.

**Step Three: Understanding**

In order to fully integrate this subject matter into courses, we must understand it. This requires research and study by faculty. But students, too, can play a part in this research, particularly at the graduate level. By exploring Internet issues for their theses, reports, and dissertations, not only do students learn, but their supervising faculty also gain better insights into those issues.

Students, particularly at the graduate level, began showing a serious interest in online advertising at about the same time the faculty was trying to climb the learning curve. This resulted in many Master's Theses and Professional Reports being written on related topics. Table 1 shows the titles of theses and reports that were written 1995 to 1998.

**Table 1. Master's Thesis and Professional Report Title**

1995	Marketing and the Internet
1995	New Media: How Do Advertising, Marketing, Promotion and P.R. Directors View New Media
1995	The Internet and the Role of the Webmaster
1995	New Rules and Realities of New Media - A Design Perspective
1996	The Beginner's Guide to Advertising on the Internet
1996	Coupons Online - Is it Worth it?
1997	Essential Elements in Creating Corporate World Wide Web Sites
1997	Content Analysis of Internet and Magazine Advertising: Informational Cues and Creative Strategies
1997	Major Advertisers' Web Presence: A Content Analysis of Top 100 Brands' Web Sites
1997	Advertising Media Reach and Frequency Estimation for the World Wide Web
1997	Adolescents' Plugging in to the World Around Them: A Study of Adolescents' Use and Perception of the Internet
1997	Net Worth: A Realistic Look at Issues Concerning African-Americans on the Internet
1997	The Future of Advertising Regulation on the Internet
1997	The Requirements of a Design Portfolio for the

	World Wide Web
1997	Teenage Girls: An Underdeveloped Internet Market Segment
1998	A Cross-Cultural Study of Internet Advertising Between Korea and the United States
1998	Web Banner Advertising: A Comparative Study of Creative Elements
1998	How Advertisers Use the World Wide Web to Reach Niche Markets
1998	Time-Oriented Appeals in Advertising: Content Analysis of Internet and Magazine Advertising
1998	A Content Analysis of Banner and Target Ads: Creative Strategies and Information Cues of Four Product Categories
1998	Marketing Entertainment on the Internet: A Research Guide and Marketing Plan
1998	Silicon Alley Speaks an Experimental Electronic Discussion
1998	From the Dentist to the Internet: Development of the U.T. Child Care Center Web Site
1998	Ambient Media: A Case Study of Electronic Merchandising
1998	Implications of the Interactive Lifestyle on How Advertising Messages are Delivered
1998	Electronic Commerce in Consumer Retailing: A Work in Progress
1998	An Exploration of Internet Advertising to Children and the Issue of Privacy
1998	Account Planning in Traditional and Interactive Web Advertising Agencies

Students' growth in interest is clear from the number of Internet-related titles per year.

Of course, Doctoral dissertations are far more time consuming than Master's reports, and the Advertising Department has 4 - 5 times more Master's students than those in the Ph.D. program. Consequently, the number of related dissertation titles is far smaller, but even these titles show growing interest by students (Table 2).

**Table 2. Ph.D. Dissertation Titles**

1996	Determinants of Desired Exposure to Interactive Advertising
1998	An Investigation of Measurement Methods and Constructs of the World Wide Web (WWW): A Multivariate Analysis of

	Website Traffic
1998	Telepresence in Advertising: "Being There"
1998	Advertising Media Models for Internet Reach/Frequency Estimation

Faculty, too, became interested and involved in such research topics. Even though many already were engaged in ongoing research projects, and pursuing research programs that began long before the Internet encroached on their professional landscape, at least 17 Internet-related research papers were published by the faculty during this same period (1995-98). And, of course, a great deal of study was conducted that did not result in published papers. The understanding that resulted was integrated into some courses, and in some cases used to create new, isolated, courses that could provide depth beyond previously established classes.

#### **Step Four: Depth**

Pre-existing courses certainly did not carry the same market equity as one dedicated to Internet advertising. They also required discarding some content to allow room for any new subjects. This severely limited the depth with which a new topic could be explored. A new class potentially could fulfill students' desires for more extensive treatment of this area. And perhaps more important, it allowed a faculty member to dedicate more time and thought to this new technology.

In 1995 the first such course was offered by one of the faculty, Mr. Gene Kincaid, under the title, One to One Advertising: the Internet. This was an undergraduate class much like a traditional Advertising Campaigns class, where students prepare a campaign for one or more clients, except that the clients in this class had a clear need or desire for Web advertising as a primary focus of their campaign.

Not long afterward, a graduate course was offered by another faculty member, Dr. John Leckenby. That class, **Interactive Advertising**, dealt with more complex technical and theoretical Internet advertising concerns. And at the undergraduate level another class, **Interactive Communication**, was added to the menu of courses emphasizing the Internet, by Dr. Gary Wilcox. This was a lower-division course designed to provide fundamental skills in using the Internet and creating Web pages.

While each of these courses offered something unique, and served a specific need, the faculty felt both students and employers would be better served with some coordination and interaction between these individual courses. After much discussion and consideration of the mechanics involved, they agreed to create an Interactive Concentration at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

### Step Five: Concentrations

In the mid-1970s the Department established a "Creative" concentration, to allow aspiring copywriters and art directors to specialize in their craft, while at the same time acquiring a more general education in the field of advertising. Like their fellow undergraduate non-creative (for want of better terminology) students, they must take numerous courses for their degree, including Fundamentals of Marketing, basic Statistics, and seven required advertising courses:

1. Introduction to Advertising
2. Introduction to Advertising Creativity
3. Media Planning
4. Advertising Research
5. Advertising and Society
6. Advertising Management
7. Advertising Campaigns

This is designed to give them a solid foundation in their chosen field. On top of that, if accepted into the Creative concentration, they would take at least three courses to help them construct a "book" of advertising work:

8. Portfolio 1 (a/k/a Beginning)
9. Portfolio 2 (a/k/a Intermediate)
10. Portfolio 3 (a/k/a Advanced)

All of these courses are upper-division, except the Introduction to Advertising. And these portfolio courses are cross-listed with the graduate curriculum, enabling graduate students also to take part in this concentration.

In 1996 the Department created a second concentration for undergraduate students, in the area of Media Planning, Buying, and Selling. This concentration built upon the same seven basic advertising courses, and offered students accepted into this concentration the following specialization classes:

8. Coaching (where they "coach" or tutor students in the basic media planning course)
9. Advanced Media
10. A choice of a Media Sales class or a Media Internship

Both of these concentrations proved to be extremely successful in terms of student placement, gaining the attention of agencies and other potential employers, and helping to build the Department's reputation. In the case of Media, the concentration also seems to be contributing to higher starting salaries for those students. Both gave students the same *breadth* of education as their peers in the Department and by comparison to other programs around the country. But both concentrations provided *depth* in their specific chosen area, beyond that of their peers in or out of the Department, giving those students a competitive edge. Given those benefits it would make sense to offer concentrations for all students, especially in an area as apparently marketable as Internet Advertising, if there were little or no cost in doing so.

The major obstacle to creating concentrations is that they require extra resources, particularly additional courses. With resources diminishing in recent years, this is an especially daunting obstacle. And while the Department already had diverted resources to create some Internet-related courses, at least one more was needed.

Only one Internet course was being offered at the graduate level, so it appeared that far too many courses would be needed to create a graduate level concentration. But even at the undergraduate level, the Interactive Communication course was being offered as a lower-division course, and so would not qualify to be a part of a concentration. To be admitted to the Advertising major, upper-division standing is required. This left only **One to One Advertising: The Internet** to be part of the concentration, which presented the faculty with questions as to whether the concentration should be graduate or undergraduate, what two other courses should be a part of the concentration, and how this could be done without additional resources.

One option would be to require students to take certain approved classes outside the Department. For example, the Department of Library Sciences offered an Introduction to Electronic Commerce, as well as a course called Information in Cyberspace. While this approach would allow the Advertising Department to tap resources already existing elsewhere on campus, it would place much of the control over the concentration in other departments. The faculty of Advertising would have no say in the content or quality, nor even any assurance that the class would continue to be offered in the future. It was clear that a more satisfactory solution would be to offer additional classes within the Advertising

Department, though the questions of what to offer and how to do so remained.

This was partially resolved when Mr. Gene Kincaid and Ms. Lisa Dobias jointly proposed a new course, called the **Digital Media Seminar**. This class was created to help students more fully comprehend the role of the Internet (and other digital communication methods) as a medium. It looks at traditional media concepts like reach and frequency in the light of digital data collection, to explain how log files, etc., can be used to more effectively and efficiently reach a targeted audience. This class seemed to fill two needs. First, it added another course to an eventual Interactive concentration and, second, it added richness to the existing Media concentration. Consequently, the course was adopted as a cross-over between the two. In Media, it would be offered as an alternative to an Internship or the Sales class. Because both instructors believed in the value of this class, they initially team-taught it as an overload, thereby temporarily circumventing the problem of limited resources. The concept for the course was so convincing that the faculty agreed that in the future resources should be diverted to this course, even if it can only be offered once each year.

Following the model of the Media concentration, it was initially decided that the final course in the Interactive Advertising (IAd) concentration would include a relevant Internship as an option. In addition, because the Department also was in need of assistance with its own website, an alternative to the Internship would be a practicum, in which students could apply their knowledge of interactive advertising as a part of a Departmental web team. The practicum (web team) would be under the direction of the Department Chairman, who already serves as the Department webmaster, but the course would be largely supervised by a graduate assistant acting in an assistant webmaster capacity.

Upon further reflection, and with a desire to do more than hobble together a concentration, the faculty decided another class was needed to deal with the unique aspects of creativity and aesthetics presented by new interactive media. Not only do these media offer images and motion, like their predecessors, they also present consumers the opportunity to interact with the sights and sounds, engaging them or altering them at their will. Because of the importance of this new capability to the brand image created for a product or service (i.e., "digital branding"), and to the ultimate cultural impact of these media, faculty felt students would not be fully educated without serious treatment of this material. Unfortunately, this

subject matter was not covered in existing courses, and did not seem appropriate for the Digital Media class, since it served as a junction between the IAd Concentration and the Media Concentration. A separate **Digital Creative Seminar** would be needed to fulfill this goal. Fortunately, a new faculty member capable of teaching this class had just joined the Department. It was decided that a rather outmoded elective course on advertising production could be dropped to free-up this new faculty member to cover the course.

Finally, in trying to decide the order students should follow in taking these courses, the faculty determined that our original interactive course, **One to One Advertising: The Internet**, in some ways had become duplicative. Some of the material would be covered in the other interactive courses. But the real value of the course was as an Internet-focussed Advertising Campaigns class, which meant students were effectively required to take two separate campaigns classes. Since the Department normally offers about three Advertising Campaigns classes each semester, it seemed logical to dedicate one of those to this new concentration. The result was that the One to One class was dropped in favor of offering **Advertising Campaigns - Interactive**. This had the side benefit of reducing the demand on teaching resources, effectively covering the increased demand created by the Digital Media Seminar.

Beginning Fall 2000, then, the initial incarnation of the IAd concentration requires students to apply to an Admission Committee composed of faculty who teach the IAd classes, as do the other concentrations. And the three elective courses in the concentration would be:

8. Digital Media Seminar
9. Digital Creative Seminar
10. Interactive Internship or Practicum

In addition, students would be required to take the following as part of their core requirements, replacing the seventh course in that core:

7. Advertising Campaigns - Interactive

The Digital Media and Digital Creative courses are required to precede the other two. The Campaigns class then acts as the capstone, applying the knowledge gained from those two courses. And because there are so many aspects to the Internet (e.g., e-commerce, database management, privacy, programming), and so many aspects to Interactivity beyond the Internet (e.g., all aspects of interpersonal communication), students also will be encouraged to take relevant elective courses in other departments across campus.

Once the faculty finalized this plan, and felt satisfied with their creation, they realized that much of the material presented to undergraduate students would be equally necessary for a graduate interactive curriculum. It also was realized that by cross-listing courses as both undergraduate and graduate, it would be possible to establish a parallel IAd concentration for graduate students without further resources. Using one existing graduate course and cross-listing two, a graduate concentration requires students to use their nine hours of elective courses - usually three courses - as follows:

1. Digital Media Seminar
2. Digital Creative Seminar
3. Interactive Advertising

As with the undergraduate concentration, students are required to complete the Digital Media and Digital Creative courses before proceeding to the final class in the concentration.

In the end, by eliminating two outdated courses and dedicating one section of a pre-existing course, an IAd concentration was formed for both undergraduate and graduate students, without needing additional resources. Although the concentration is just beginning, the final step already has begun. Since the first Internet class was offered in the Department, placement of those students in Internet-related positions has been a concern of the faculty.

#### **Step Six: Placement**

It has proved impossible to track all the students who have been placed into positions related to the Internet. Some of them have not kept contact with the Department, some began in other positions but later moved into Internet jobs, and in some cases neither their employer nor their job titles reveal the reality that they are doing Internet-related work. In spite of this, it is clear that a growing number of students are entering such positions.

Alums of the Department's Internet courses now work in a variety of positions taking advantage of that education. Several work for Web Advertising specialist agencies (e.g., marchFIRST, CPS Group), others at the Internet divisions of traditional agencies (e.g., Giant Spider, DDB Digital), some at "dot com" companies (e.g., DrKoop.Com, Deja News), a few with corporations trying to support an online presence (e.g., Tandy Corporation, Dell Computer, Apple Computer), a handful working for media planning and buying agencies

(Saper Media Group), and a few doing freelance work. At least one took a position with the government, as a Congressional Aide, to help with representatives' Internet outreach.

The number of opportunities for these students seems virtually limitless. Placement of students who have taken even a single course in Internet Advertising has proved to be relatively simple. Since the Internet is so young, anyone with *any* relevant knowledge can be valuable. And there is no such thing as someone with 15 or 20 years experience in this area. Consequently, alums who are only 3 or 4 years out of school are reaching high-level supervisory positions in these companies. This also means they are now, in many cases, the ones doing the hiring. This is proving to open many doors for the Department's more recent graduates.

As the Department's other concentrations have shown, successful placement is a key to making a concentration succeed. Beginning this concentration with a history of placement in this area carries the promise of continued success.

### **CONCLUSION**

As Internet Advertising becomes more established, and more people have experience in this specialty, students who have taken only a single course on the topic will be less and less attractive to companies. However, those who have a "concentration" in this area still should be desirable new hires for Internet-related positions. And as non-Internet interactive technologies spread, such as electronic out-of-home media, the numbers of job possibilities for students from an Interactive Advertising concentration should continue to expand for many years to come.

Like the concentrations that preceded it, the Interactive Advertising concentration no doubt will evolve over time. It may be modified and improved, as new and better ideas develop. Or, at some point the faculty may deem such a concentration altogether unnecessary or redundant, as the subject matter of these courses becomes wholly entwined in the content of classes concerned with media, research, management, campaigns, etc. But in the meantime, both students and those who hire them may benefit from the depth of study enabled by this concentrated series of courses.

### **END NOTES**

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