

Online MBA

by Donna Walsh

IT SEEMS SAFE to say that in 2006, access to the Internet at home, work, or the local library is a given for most of us. This “window to the world” continues to become more available, more accessible, more affordable, and faster.

When the Internet was less mature, online learning was regarded as a gimmick—a poor substitute for the “real deal” that could only be obtained through traditional classroom learning. This is no longer the case. Undergraduate and graduate degrees earned online are no longer regarded with suspicion.

This nontraditional mode of learning continues to move into the mainstream. It has afforded many people—particularly those with demanding jobs and busy lives—the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to enhance their career opportunities. But online learning doesn’t come easily. In

many ways, it requires more discipline and commitment than traditional learning opportunities.

Cardean University was one of the earlier online degree providers and has a distinguished academic foundation. Its programs have been developed in collaboration with four renowned traditional institutions: Stanford, Columbia, the University of Chicago, and the London School of Economics.

Cardean is a pure online university, meaning it has both undergraduate and graduate online degree programs but does not offer traditional classroom instruction. After going through a series of changes the last few years, it was recently relaunched.

In addition to its MBA program, Cardean University offers several graduate certificate programs. These programs are designed for professionals who want to acquire advanced knowledge and skills in various fields of study. Many of the same courses available to Cardean MBA students are offered in the certificate programs. The credits earned for a certificate can count toward completion of the MBA program.

participation in online discussions. Each student is expected to share his insights, experiences, and opinions. In addition, reading assignments include a textbook, a course book consisting of *Harvard Business Review* articles, and a multitude of Internet links and graphics.

Students must complete eight written assignments. Each assignment has a specific due date. Six of the assignments are completed on an individual basis and two as a team. Each written assignment consists of a scenario in which the student is the marketing agent in an organization that receives memos, reports, and other information regarding a detailed case study. The assignment not only requires the student to respond to numerous questions but also to take a position on an issue that does not have one correct answer.

It is up to the student to support her point of view persuasively with data and information obtained from the links in the virtual classroom as well as readings from the textbook.

Team assignments are an opportunity to work with classmates. The lack of face-to-face contact somewhat diminished our ability to interact and connect fully, but it was still a worthwhile experience.

Managerial Marketing
Online MBA course, 2006
Cardean University
www.cardean.edu
866.948.1289
\$665 per credit hour

Recommendation

The Cardean course excelled in a number of important areas and was very good in others. The online university promises a quality education—as long as you are up to the task. Anyone still under the impression that online learning is an easy alternative to traditional MBA programs is in for a rude awakening. The coursework is difficult and intense. Deliverables are expected to be well written, concise, and submitted on time. At the same time, you will receive more feedback from the professor than you may have ever experienced in a classroom. Professionals accustomed to doing what is required to achieve personal goals will do well earning credits online.

Managerial Marketing

Cardean’s MBA program, Managerial Marketing, is a first-year MBA course. All new MBA candidates start with the nine-week marketing course to familiarize themselves with online study. All other MBA courses are six weeks. New courses begin every three weeks.

Managerial Marketing focuses on how to analyze the marketing environment, including customers and competition, and how to align marketing efforts with a company’s strategic goals. Students learn to determine which customers should be targeted in the marketing effort, choose which products the company should offer, ascertain the method and timing for informing customers about the product, and determine the best pricing strategy and the most effective way to bring the product to market.

Course requirements

There is no prerequisite for Managerial Marketing. Course requirements include

Learning environment

The learning environment is a secure virtual classroom that students access with a user ID and password. One area of the classroom is a forum where each student is expected to post an introduction as well as participate in ongoing discussions initiated by the instructor. Students are encouraged to share their experiences from the workplace.

These discussions are useful and valuable to the learning experience. Students can also communicate privately with the instructor. In addition to the venues for discussions and assignment submissions, there also is a virtual café for informal social conversation.

The reference links provided in the virtual classroom were a source of frustration for me. Each “parent” link contained copious “child” links and within each link, there was yet another link that needed to be read. It would have been more efficient, less time consuming, and

We liked...

- There are venues for discussion, assignment submission, and informal social conversation.
- Each assignment was returned with detailed written feedback.

Could be better...

- The lack of face-to-face contact somewhat diminished student interaction.
- The reference links had too many layers to navigate.

less frustrating if all the information was presented in a linear fashion within the parent link. This design seems to be the norm for online learning because I experienced the same frustration with another online course completed at a different university.

Instructors

Cardean courses are taught either by full-time faculty or part-

time adjunct faculty, who are working professionals with experience directly related to the course material or university faculty with PhDs. The faculty are required to hold a PhD or master's degree in their subject area, and the majority of instructors have significant work experience related to their respective course.

My instructor, Sandra, was excellent. She demonstrated her commitment to learning before our class began. I was returning from a business trip before the first class, and I received an email from Sandra gently reminding me to post an introduction on our class forum. I appreciated her attentiveness and genuine concern.

In addition, she was a terrific facilitator. She initiated discussions that closely resembled those in a traditional classroom. She participated but did not monopolize our discussions.

Each writing assignment was returned with detailed written feedback, which was crucial to my learning experience. The coursework was challenging, and the assignments were sometimes overwhelming. Sandra provided feedback that helped me approach the next assignment with more confidence and ease.

I hope that every online instructor I encounter is as effective and at ease in a virtual classroom as Sandra.

Online support

Although the class enrollment was small, my classmates were professionals who

wanted to expand their knowledge of marketing to develop new skills and knowledge for their respective jobs. Our entire class fully participated in the online discussions and team projects, but more students would have made for a richer experience, I think.

As soon as I completed course registration, my Cardean student life program coordinator emailed an invitation to attend a student orientation session. The email was informative and helpful, and so was the orientation. An admissions representative also emailed to confirm that I was set to go with the course and invited me to contact him if I had any difficulties. When I was unable to log-in to the virtual classroom, the admissions staff member quickly responded, resolving the glitch. He even followed up with a phone call.

Value for the money

A Cardean graduate course costs \$1,995, or \$665 per credit hour, along with an \$85 processing fee. I spent about \$200 for a used textbook, workbook, and two job aids—and zero for parking, tolls, and gas for the commute. Online education itself doesn't cost less than traditional classroom programs, and I felt the value matched the price. But online students can save money on "overhead," such as commuting, meals, time away from a job, and other similar costs.

Managerial Marketing product rating (out of 4)

Educational experience	****
Quality of faculty	****
Quality of students	***
Value of peer-to-peer learning	***
Quality of content	***.5
Technical and administrative support	***.5
Value for the money	***.5
Overall rating	***.5

Donna Walsh is the principal and founder of RedShoes Solutions, a company that helps clients maximize potential, overcome obstacles, and achieve goals; Donna@RedShoes.biz.

Customer Service

Reviewed by Randy Woodward

CUSTOMER SERVICE is the life blood of any business, and customer service training is my passion. As a result, I have very high standards for any service training products. Happily, so do the producers of *Customer Service at Work*.

Originally produced in 2003 for a British audience, this video has recently been updated for release in the United States. It focuses on four employees at a travel agency call center who have unique sets of strengths and weaknesses. Several short scenes are presented, each followed by narrative discussion of what the employees did well and not so well. As the scenes progress, they tell a story of how one of the employees finds success by honing service skills.

Not too British

At 15 minutes, this video is just about the right length to be effective without dragging. Production values are excellent, and the acting is very good, with characters that are believable and likable, even when they make mistakes.

Customer Service at Work

Video, 2005, 15 minutes

BBC, distributed in United States by

Coastal Training Technologies

800.725.3418

www.coastal.com

\$695

Recommendation

I've always believed that customer service is a skill best learned through live interactions. This video would be useful as an example of desirable behaviors when accompanied by group discussion and skill practice. It would also be effective in instances where distance makes group facilitation difficult. Although I seldom encounter video training that I would use or recommend, I would have no problem

RATINGS

We liked...

- The production is excellent, and acting is good.

- The concepts are classic, tried-and-true methods.

Could be better...

- It mostly takes place at one venue, a call center.

- This video does not have support material.

You won't find yourself apologizing for it either, as is so often the case with training videos.

The service concepts are classic, tried-and-true methods presented in a fresh and fast-paced manner.

Although the narrator has an American accent, the actors are all British.

Take this into account if

you're concerned your audience might have difficulty understanding English as spoken in Britain. Also, since all the situations except one take place in a call center, people working in other service venues might experience difficulty transferring the concepts to their daily duties.

This video does not have any support materials.

Customer Service at Work product rating (out of 4)

Holds viewer interest	***.5
Acting/presenting	****
Diversity	**
Production quality	****
Value of content	***
Instructional value	** .5
Value for the money	**
Overall rating	***.5

Randy Woodward is the director of training and development for Ho-Chunk Casino in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin; www.ho-chunk.com.

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