

Preparing for Case Discussion¹

In preparing for class, we recommend that you read the case three times. The first reading should be a quick run-through of the text in the case. It should give you a feeling for what the case is about and the types of data it contains. Your second reading should be in more depth. Many people like to underline or mark up their cases to pick out important points they know will be needed later. Your major effort on a second reading should be to understand the decision problem and context. For example, analyze the case with respect to customer behavior and trends, competitor's behavior and trends, and the firm's strengths and weaknesses.

On your second reading, carefully examine the exhibits in the case. Usually the case writer has put the exhibits there for a purpose, although some exhibits will be superfluous and some may even be inconsistent -- just as real data are. But mostly, the exhibits contain information that will be useful in analyzing the situation. You will often find that you will need to apply an analytical technique to an exhibit in order to benefit from the information in the raw data. Averages, ratios, break-even analyses, and comparisons with other exhibits are often helpful.

On the third reading you should have a good idea of the fundamentals of the case. Now you will be searching to understand the specific decision problem. Part of the case analysis process, as in real life, is identifying the real decision problem amidst lots of data and information. It is your task to figure out what decision(s) must be made (if a decision needs to be made at all), make action recommendations, and consider how you would specifically implement your recommendation.

Sometimes you will get thinking questions about the cases (posted on the class web-site). Before the third reading you may want to review these questions to stimulate your thinking and highlight issues that you should have a working knowledge of before the class discussion. These questions are not necessarily "tips for a successful case solution," but rather are meant to insure that everyone understands the basics of the case and the discussion can begin "on the same page."

During the class discussion, you should be prepared to share your thoughts on the real problems and issues of the case and present a persuasive summary of your recommendations. Be prepared to explain why you rejected any obvious alternative courses of action and provide vital facts supporting acceptance of your recommendation. *Your goal is to convince the class that your recommendation is the best.* However, a rigorous approach will consider both sides to every recommendation. You should be up-front about potential problems you might expect in implementing your recommendation.

Finally, an important concern in any discipline is the ethics of its practitioners. This is certainly true in marketing and advertising. Ethical issues will arise in the case discussions and lecture discussions. Indeed, some managers in the cases act in ways your might not consider ethical (and in some situations these actions are mentioned in the case specifically to raise ethical issues). We encourage you to address these issues in class discussion.

¹ Dan Ariely & Michael Norton, "Syllabus for 15.840 – Marketing Management, Spring 2004"