

CHAMPAGNE HO ON A BEER CV



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They're young and they're techno-savvy. They're Generation Y – born after 1980 – and they're graduating from university. Around 700 of them want to start work in a marketing department next year – maybe even your marketing department. Those are the facts. What this new generation wants and who's going to give it to them is still a matter for conjecture.

Generation Y has been called “the most occupationally and educationally ambitious generation ever” (Schneider and Stevenson, *The Ambitious Generation*). But it's not just about money – this generation wants a life as well. Like their Gen X predecessors, Gen Y is characterised by ambition, individualism, optimism, cynicism and pluralism. Its members have little respect for tradition or “the way things are done”. They're also the most media-savvy generation in history, which makes them internally wired for a career in marketing. You'd think.

“Generation Y people are expecting more lifestyle,” says Geoff Shaw, director of marketing recruitment firm Synchronicity apc. It might be safe to assume that most of this year's 700-1000 marketing graduates will be looking to exercise the skills they've been developing for the last three or four years but, “They're seeing that working 80 hours a week doesn't promise anything. [So] they want more flexibility.”

And job satisfaction, too. A UC Berkeley study in the US showed Gen Yers were not so much worried about finding a job, but more about finding a satisfying job.

But while some students might choose marketing as the ‘soft’ option for a business degree, by the time they finish they might be wishing they had stuck with accounting – marketing career opportunities, once ripe for the picking by any young graduate, are now shrivelling. While things might not be as bad as they are in India, where 32,000 people recently applied for one marketing position, the shrinkage or movement overseas of marketing departments can make it hard for graduates – even in big brand businesses.

BY SIMON YOUNG & ADELE GAUTIER

“Our company is very small,” says Daewoo’s Robin Curtis. “For that reason we’re using only experienced marketers.”

“I think hiring graduates is good for the marketing community, and it’s good for the business to have younger people who know that part of the market,” says Robert Bree, marketing director at Restaurant Brands. “But with marketing departments getting smaller, often a department is just two people – the marketing manager and one other. A lot of companies would struggle with the ‘other’ being a new graduate.”

Louise Tunwald graduated in 2000 with a marketing degree, only to find it was nearly impossible to get a marketing job. “I knew it was going to be hard, but I didn’t know quite how hard.” She now works in media.

Nary, a third-year marketing student

at Auckland, looks uncertain when asked how hard it will be to find a marketing job. “Definitely hard,” she says. “There’s too much competition. Employers are looking for high grades and good communication skills. I’m so afraid.”

Money matters

When asked how much they believed they would earn in their first year on the job, most marketing students guessed accurately – between \$30,000 and \$35,000 – although one feisty character from Otago believed that “after five years worth of study I should be worth a decent amount!”

Some will get lucky – Unitec graduate Jason Bentley landed a marketing consultant/account manager job with ad agency Metromedia. “The advertising agency’s quite flamboyant with salaries. Generally, if you’re looking at a marketing job, you’re looking at somewhere around \$30,000, mid-\$30,000s at the most. I [got] between \$40,000 and \$45,000.”

Not as lucky, but more typical, Waikato graduate Craig Wolfe is now a sales rep at SC Johnson. His salary was within the normal bracket, but “I got a company car on top. If you add the car, it’s better than my expectations.”

Decent or not, the low to mid-\$30,000s is generally the starting base salary for young graduates.

“I have employed people for less than that starting out, but if they’re any good, they would move up pretty quickly,” says Chris Thompson, marketing director at Xtra. He says that salary expectations vary wildly. “I’ve had people who think they should earn \$90,000 in year one.”

He was equally surprised when an administration position he advertised, paying around \$18,000, attracted applications from people with marketing and commerce degrees. “Quite a few of them were from marginalised [sectors], especially women from ethnic minorities.

“There is still a skew [in some employers] towards young males.” He hastens to add that the marketing team at Xtra has at least its fair share of female staffers.

“Most graduates have reasonably mod-

est expectations,” says Bree. “They know they have a lot to learn, and that corporations expect their pound of flesh, but there is a degree of ambition, as you’d expect. Some employers try to get slave labour, but others know that if they want quality work, they need to keep it in balance.”

There’s more to life...

As important as it is to pay off student loans, salary is not the critical factor for these graduates. A good environment – important to the highly individualistic Gen Y seeking self-expression – and ongoing development and training are also necessary.

“[Here], everyone is around age 25, so everyone’s pretty on to it,” says Metromedia’s Bentley. “Having that type of environment, you actually feed off everyone around you. You work in a team and if people aren’t of the same sort of calibre, with the same type of understanding that you have, it probably won’t be as smooth.”

Flexibility helps, too, Bentley says: “I prefer my life not to revolve around a nine-to-five job, because you get stuck in the same old routine. A round of mid-week golf is always good to slip in if you can! You just give your employer the understanding that you don’t mind working late if they’re more flexible on your working hours as well.”

Which means he may not want a job at Restaurant Brands, where Bree suggests that young marketers would expect to work from around eight to six-thirty on the average day, more when the pressure is on or when business and social occasions mix.

“I look at the culture,” says third-year Auckland University student Michael Owers, “what the company has to offer, because work’s not everything. You go to work, you want to have fun there as well as get the job done.”

Those who want to keep up their professional development should choose their employer carefully, believes Shaw. “Graduates typically spend 17 years of their lives learning. They go to a job and, if that company doesn’t have a strong training and development ethos, after they’ve learnt the job they’re [saying] ‘where to from here? What’s the

What Gen Y Expects From Its Employers

1. Provide challenging work that really matters.
2. Balance clearly delegated assignments with the freedom and flexibility to produce results in their own way.
3. Offer increasing responsibility as a reward for accomplishments.
4. Spend time getting to know staff members and their capabilities.
5. Provide ongoing training and learning opportunities.
6. Establish mentoring relationships.
7. Create a comfortable, low-stress environment.
8. Allow some flexibility in scheduling.
9. Be personable and joke around with the staff while still getting the job done.
10. Balance roles of ‘boss’ with ‘team player’.
11. Treat Yers as colleagues, not as interns, assistants, or ‘teenagers’.
12. Be respectful and call forth respect in return.
13. Consistently provide constructive feedback.
14. Let Yers know when they’ve done a good job.

Source Dr Carolyn Martin, co-author of *“Managing Generation Y”*

next thing I'm learning?"

Beauty company L'Oréal has invested a lot of time and energy into its pepinnaire (French for 'nursery' and idiom for 'marketing student') programme.

"The biggest thing for a lot of students," says L'Oréal HR manager Philip Fernandez, "is ongoing training and development, support, a career path, a company that listens, [and] a good working environment. All that exceeds salary. We're very specific about why they've been chosen. We've got a plan for them and it coincides with their plan and together we're going to get them there. But at the end of the day it falls back to them. They've got to work hard – we can support, we can give them the tools, the means and the guidance but they've got to get there themselves.

"And it's very possible, because they see around them – around the world –

young graduates that have made it through and are now general managers in their early 30s."

Have your say

From the free-thinking and opinionated rhetoric of university to the inscrutable pecking order of the corporate world. How much influence do graduates expect to have in their new careers?

"Probably at first you don't have a huge amount of decision-making power," guesses Christie from Otago. "You're learning the ropes, learning about the business and their strategies, their systems. I suppose after 18 months or a couple of years you start to move up the ranks and get a feel for where you want to go."

Michael Owers is not so conservative: "After I've done my training, I'd expect to have a reasonable amount of say if I disagreed with what was going on. I'd

expect to be listened to. Even the highest ranking [executive] can get something wrong, so you've got to look to the rest of your staff to offer ideas. I expect to be looked to [as having] a degree of knowledge."

His comments fit with the Generation Y profile, but may not go down well with potential future employers.

The biggest failing of graduates, says Chris Caiger, marketing consultant at PlaceMakers, is their "very unrealistic expectations of how quickly they're going to progress. They seem to expect to be md within two years – at the outside!"

This, he says, creates tension within the individual, and in the way the graduate behaves with other people – often seen in a superior attitude. "They don't want to be bogged down in the detailed stuff. They have to learn that while they need the strategic frame-

Work-Based Training – Does It Taste Like The Real Thing?

Dave Hodges is head of the Applied Business School at Unitec, which has recently introduced a marketing major and currently has about 30 graduates. Key to its course is work-based learning, with students spending two days a week for a whole semester in a local company.

"One of the key benefits is not so much that they get to see what marketing is about in the real world," says Hodges, "but there's a whole lot of other things that happen in the workplace that you cannot replicate in the classroom. [It's] the whole work learning environment – both formal and informal processes and systems that workplaces have, performance expectations and other factors."

Robert Aitken, senior teaching fellow at Otago University, says: "We work with a lot of local real clients, so there's a lot of interchange and students can see what's going on in the real world. They're actually managing projects themselves in that context. That real life experience starts from the first year as well, so it's not just suddenly 'tacked on'."

Alan Leigh, director of Fuse Marketing and acting sales and marketing manager for Walker Wireless, agrees: "The best marketers that I've come across understand the customer from a real perspective, rather than a theoretical perspective."

The work experience programmes benefit employers, too. "It gives [students] the opportunity to work out, 'is this the type of organisation I want to work in, is this the type of job I want

do?'" Hodges says. "There's quite a lot of overseas research showing that students who've been exposed to the workplace before they graduate stay with [their first employer] longer, because they've already worked out what type of organisation or what type of position they're looking for."

Students appreciate the opportunities that work experience provides, but say getting a job can still be a bit of a shock.



"It's quite different out there in the real world," says Christie, an honours student from Otago. "I feel quite happy with my course, but there's a lot of stuff that you can't really learn in the classroom."

Metromedia's Jason Bentley says that despite his work-based training, nothing compares to the real thing. "It did prepare me quite well because it gave me insight into exactly how the industry worked. But nothing can really prepare you [better than] actually going out there and experiencing it first hand."

work, first up is the nitty-gritty.”

Xtra's Chris Thompson agrees. “I have to tell them, ‘you're going to spend a year or two doing donkey work, before you get to drive the ship’. I asked one guy why he'd done a bad job at something, and he said, ‘it's small stuff and I know I'm better than that’. I told him, until he does a fantastic job on the small stuff I won't give him anything bigger.”

That attitude, he says, is the exception. “Generally, they know you're watching and they're keen to make a go of it.” In fact, sometimes graduates are too enthu-

siastic. Information requested from a keen new graduate is likely to come encumbered with a largely irrelevant three-page attachment on the state of the economy – Thompson suggests that discerning what is needed is a key skill graduates should learn.

To help graduates get a sense of perspective, Caiger recommends that employers should include them in all aspects of planning, and involve them in meetings and communications, so they can see their place in the organisation.

“Try to give them projects with autonomy, on a small scale, from inception to delivery. If they just have individual tasks and can't see the rest of the picture, it can be fairly soul-destroying.” Even jobs like photocopying and stuffing envelopes – at some stage the responsibility of every marketer – can take on meaning when given a wider context.

Chris Price, general manager of Messagemedia is also in favour of giving graduates responsibility. “There's a lot of talent out there, and [you need] to give as much freedom as you can afford to, while also knowing that they've got to be productive.”

All talk, no walk

Graduates may be clear about what they want, but some still have to work out what it is they can offer employers, who say that graduates get a good grounding in theory and strategy at university, but have fewer practical skills.

“Some [graduates] are incredibly cocky at a very young age thinking they know it all,” says Alan Leigh, director of Fuse Marketing and acting sales and

marketing manager for Walker Wireless. “You can have the right marketing strategy and tactics – absolutely on the money – but if you fail to implement them, it's absolutely no good. More often than not this is where I see a young graduate fall down.”

Part of the problem is the heady nature of strategic marketing taught in the third year at university. Students essentially learn marketing management, a function they won't be performing for years. Does this set them up for disappointment?

“A lot of graduates are taught all this interesting strategic stuff, and then they get a [junior] role and think ‘what am I doing here?’” says Geoff Shaw. “Managing expectations is one of the biggest problems for companies.”

“They want to do environmental analyses and SWOT analyses all the time,” says Thompson. “It would be more useful if they could do pricing strategies and market research.”

Understanding strategy is good, it just needs to be put in the right perspective, say others. “If they have the strategic overview, they can deal with any opportunities within that range,” says Otago University's senior teaching fellow Robert Aitken. “But the reality is, they're not likely to go into a position where they can put that strategy into place. We try to make that clear at the entry level.”

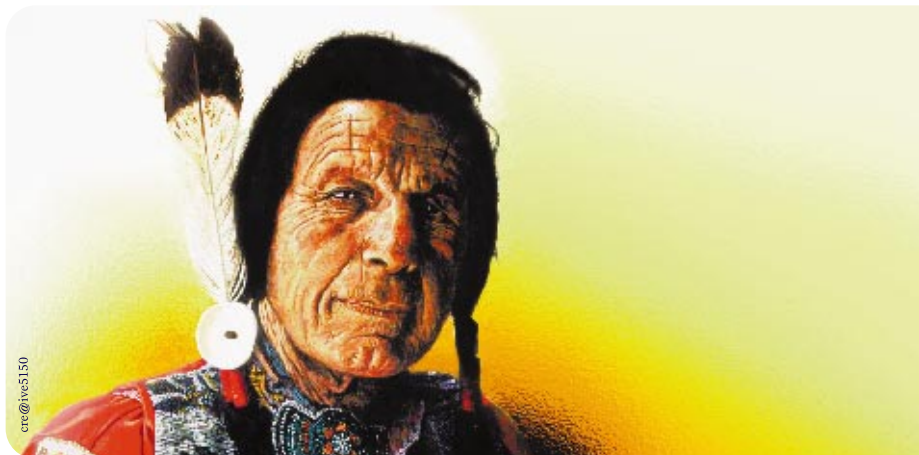
Caiger believes that an ability to take the strategic view can ensure that lower level tasks are performed better. “You can apply a technique to writing a questionnaire, without necessarily ending up with a good questionnaire.” It is impor-

Graduates: Pick Your Company Well

Geoff Shaw, director of career coaching at graduate placement firm Synchronicity apc on how graduates should choose their employer – if they do have a choice.

“Pick the company, then the job, then [ask] could you live with the money. If you get the first one right the others will tend to follow. But if you pick an average quality company, when you go to your next job, people don't know what quality experience you've had.”

Companies are like brands, he says. They have certain elements that everyone recognises. “Good, bad or otherwise, at least it's a known quantity. And career wise, that's a plus for graduates. If you've picked a good first [employer], your career will forgive some transgressions later on. Somebody who's picked an average start has to scramble that much harder down the track.”



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tant he says, for graduates to be able to see the strategic element of what they are doing.

In ignoring their understanding of theory, Price believes companies might actually be missing an opportunity to get the most from their graduates. "It's a shame that recent learning is not being picked up on and used. As managers, if we knew what that last year [of study involved], perhaps we could look at trying to reconfirm some theoretical work that we haven't thought about for a while. It may be worthwhile getting a refresher."

The missing link

Chris Caiger believes that the most important thing university offers is "a sense of perspective – they come out thinking about the value the organisation is trying to create".

But some – both employers and graduates – feel that universities should be delivering more.

Aaron, a student at Auckland University, says, "It still feels like there's a gap somewhere. When I sit back and read through I know what I'm doing, but in the real world when someone asks me a question I'm not too sure."

Is the curriculum partly to blame? Summer Collins, a recent graduate and project manager at NFO CM Research, thinks so, at least where market research is concerned. "I took a market research paper at university, and it was a complete waste of time."

"There are not too many people that come out of university and say 'I want to do market research' and have a true understanding of what it's all about,"

confirms Nicola Meyers-Smith, CM Research's HR manager.

Others believe that universities should be teaching more general, life skills.

"I don't know if there's [enough] work done on time management and priority management," says Chris Price. "Early on [graduates] can get quite easily swamped in these roles, because they're keen to work and you're keen to give them work."

Collins agrees: "I've definitely learnt to manage time more effectively. I didn't have that down at varsity at all, but now I have to, to do my job."


Robert Bree suggests graduates do not typically learn good communications skills at university. Yet they typically have exposure to a wide range of senior managers in both formal and informal situations, and the ability to communicate with those people is more important than intellect when it comes to getting ahead. "Because they're young, we tend to give graduates a lot of latitude, but that's the real difference between high performers and average performers – how well they share ideas and take on new ideas."

Students asked about communication skills spoke of being extroverted or creating good-looking reports, but did not seem familiar with the need to, as Bree says, put things "clearly, succinctly and persuasively".

But for all their willingness to debate the strengths and weaknesses of a university marketing education, employers claim they hire graduates on attitude rather than skills. The latter, they say, can be easily picked up on the job.

"My expectations are that graduates are keen to learn, good listeners, with a reasonable amount of ambition," says Bree.

Auckland University marketing student James says: "I reckon it comes down to who you are, and what you do with what you've learnt."

Are they even speaking the same language? 

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Putting Things In Perspective

The graduates of today were born when...

- The Springboks toured New Zealand for the last time in a long while.
- Flares were out (but only just) and spiky hair was in.
- Split Enz were world famous and still performing.
- Robert Muldoon was prime minister.
- New Zealand had only two tv channels, both state-owned.
- Video tapes and CDs were the latest, greatest thing.
- Gallipoli, Chariots of Fire and Raiders of the Lost Ark were hitting cinemas.
- The internet was still an obscure US Defense Department project.



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