

COMPUTER NEED CONSULTANT (CNC)  
THE NEW PROFESSIONAL IN THE COMPUTER INDUSTRY

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## INTRODUCTION

The major topic of a recent Softcon Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, (March 31 - April 3, 1985) was the slow growth of the software industry. While attending the conference it became apparent that the majority of the participants were technical people with limited knowledge of marketing, addressing marketing problems. The few marketing people attending the conference had limited technical background; corporate training and on-the-job experience appeared to be the major sources of their technical development with little or no academic preparation.

A technical specialist for IBM Personal Computers in Boca Raton, Florida, also recently indicated that IBM's failure to market small computers could be the result of poor marketing strategy, as well as a lack of salesman training for this new target market.

Based upon the above observations, the focal point of this paper will be the academic preparation of computer specialists with both marketing and technical skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Jeanne Greenberg studied the psychological profiles of salespeople working for companies producing high-tech products and found some striking differences in the successful salespeople of high-tech products, from those who thrive in almost every other selling field. For instance, in every other kind of selling situation, closing the sale is the ultimate means of persuasion, providing enormous ego enhancement. However, in selling high-tech products, if the need to persuade is too intense, it can be a hindrance - rather than an asset as in most sales situations. The successful high-tech salesperson has to come across as extremely attentive to a client's needs, and totally intent upon seeking an ideal solution to each client's unique problems. A high-tech salesperson should be perceived by clients as a technically knowledgeable, sincere, and competent professional - with a strong sense of personal integrity. This kind of sale forms the basis for a continuing, long-lasting relationship in which the salesperson serves as a consultant.

John Hoffman, vice-president of sales for Computer Sciences Corporation, an international computer-based services firm, goes so far as to say, "When it comes to high-tech sales, the old rules of selling no longer apply." This is because the high-tech salespeople actually sell solutions, not products or services. These solutions are customized to

meet the unique needs of each client.

According to Don Walker, vice-president of sales for Comshare, Inc., a firm providing computer time-sharing services, "There is no widgeit for each problem, which distinguishes high-tech from any other kind of sale." Since each client has unique needs, each high-tech product or service must be tailored to meet those needs completely - or else the sale will be lost to a competitor.

Bob Latavik, a manager for Prime Computer, one of the first manufacturers of mini-computers, says, "High-tech salespeople do not have to convince just one individual, such as a purchasing agent, within a firm." They have to convincingly speak the language of programmers, systems analysts, directors of information, managers of research, financial controllers, vice-presidents of marketing, presidents and chief executive officers.

#### CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

To sell technical products, one has to be technically-oriented to succeed. But not all people who are technically-oriented can sell. In fact, from the point of basic personality characteristics, the successful salesperson and the successful technician are polar opposites. Simply moving people from the technical side to the sales side would be nothing less than corporate suicide.

Short of hiring twins, it is difficult to come across someone who can stand out in both the technical and sales ends of the business world. A recent study by Source Edp shows that 90% of scientific programmers and analysts are interested in exploring new computer jobs. Some of these individuals with the technical expertise have the untapped, innate ability to sell.

A program was needed to uncover, assess, and develop a combination of technical and sales talents. The "Marketing Computer Technology" course at Central Missouri State University is accomplishing that goal of blending the technical and marketing skills to prepare students for the fast-paced challenges in the high-tech world of today.

The development of both the marketing and technical skills is aimed at preparing the student for consulting in computer needs and applications. The program will lead to a new career, i.e. Computer Need Consultant (CNC).

## SURVEY OF BUSINESSES

Information obtained from the survey of literature and attendance at the Softcon Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, indicated that a void exists within the computer technology industry. To further define the void, 500 computer companies involved in both research and development of computer hardware and software products were surveyed. The survey was to elicit responses as to the industry need for staff who are skilled in both the marketing and computer disciplines.

Data obtained from the survey indicated strong, unanimous support and enthusiasm for the development of personnel who possess both technical and marketing skills. In particular, the feedback from the companies strongly suggested needs for communication and interpersonal abilities in addition to the technical skills.

The value and importance of the course "Marketing Computer Technology" is obvious from the following quotes obtained from the business survey:

"As an expatriate of university teaching, it is with a sense of identification that I agree with you that, in fact, our educational system can produce a more prepared alumni by incorporating the practical along with the academic in the material presented to the students."

Director, Product Marketing,  
Greyhound Capital Corporation.

"It appears that you are on your way to establishing a very useful program for the computer industry."

Executive Vice President of  
Marketing and Sales, Micro Data  
Base Systems, Inc.

"Your proposed program to prepare college students for a career in marketing hardware and software products sounds very exciting and I congratulate you on setting this up."

Executive Vice President, Data  
Systems Group.

"Your proposal sounds like a most interesting one; we agree that input from the computer

industry would greatly impact the realism and applicability to market needs."

Dorothy J. Selinger, IBM.

"I believe you are on the right track and will meet definite needs."

President, Management  
Accountability Group, Inc.

"It is indeed largely true that people involved in marketing computer products tend to have technical or marketing expertise, but seldom do they have both."

Lane Webster, Hewlett Packard.

In addition to comments concerning the desirability of a program to prepare computer need consultants, the survey also solicited information on instructional methodology and curriculum. Some of the suggestions on methodology for the class "Marketing Computer Technology" are as follows:

- Guest speakers in the classroom
- Role-playing the customer/client relationship
- Sales presentations in the classroom, which would be videotaped for critical analysis at the end of the presentation
- Utilize product (NCR PC) which crosses all product lines/vocational areas in order to evaluate skills
- Participant interaction
- Individualized critiques
- Emphasis on customer needs, not self-interest.

Recommended curriculum topics for the course "Marketing Computer Technology" are as follows:

- Business decision-making and capital appropriation processes
- Proposal preparation
- Effective presentation skills
- Finance, accounting, and marketing as interrelated disciplines
- People skills
- Demonstrating skills (pub/presentational speaking)
- Problem-solving

- Broad range of application software
- Selling skills and techniques for creative marketing ability
- Staying away from buzz words in teaching (i.e., "state-of-the-art")
- Benefits to customers based on their individual needs (i.e., personal and business application needs)
- Perceived needs of the clients - Perception and attitude of customer toward company, product, and salespeople.

#### COURSE DEVELOPMENT

The philosophy of the course is to develop students as CNCs. This is in contrast to preparing students to be salespeople. The goal is to help the prospect "buy", not to "sell" the prospect. The company representative, in his or her counselor role, will be able to establish trust, uncover the need or problem, help the client to meet the need or to solve the problem, and offer support to the client. The premise is that effective "marketing" of computer technology can take place when both the "client" and the "counselor" benefit from the technical counseling experience.

The specific goals for the course, entitled "Marketing Computer Technology" include:

1. To understand the CNC process;
2. To understand the "whys" of successful counseling by understanding people according to the ideas propagated by the behavioral sciences;
3. To understand "computer needs" in a counseling situation;
4. To understand the real "purpose" of counseling in Marketing Computer Technology.

Specific topics covered in the course are:

1. Introduction to the counseling philosophies,
2. Development of the Need - Benefit - Feature Concept,
3. Client styles and roles,
4. Effective communication and listening techniques, in counseling,
5. Questioning techniques,
6. Introduction to handling objections, and
7. Buying signals and closing techniques.

The above mentioned topics are taught as they apply to the marketing of computer

technology. The course will be taught via case studies, role-playing activities, guest lecturers, article reviews, and field experiences.

#### INTEGRATING THE COURSE WITH OTHER CURRICULA

The course entitled, "Marketing Computer Technology", is designed to:

- a) develop consulting skills as they relate to solving marketing problems within the computer technology industry,
- b) provide information on product life-cycle, psychology of buying behaviors, product development, and projected trends in computer technology.

In order to achieve the above, the program has been divided into 3 broad categories: Basic Business, Computer Information Systems, and Marketing requirements.

The courses offered under the Basic Business requirements are:

- Acct 2101 Elementary Accounting I
- Acct 2102 Elementary Accounting II
- BAdm 2320 Business Law I
- BAdm 3310 Principles of Management
- BAdm 4305 Business Policy
- BAdm 3300 Law & Contemporary Problems
- BE&O 3525 Business Writing
- Econ 1011 Principles of Economics
- Fin 5800 Managerial Finance
- Fin 3850 Principles of Finance
- CIS 1600 Principles of CIS
- CIS 4660 Database Management Systems

The above courses provide the students with a basic business background.

The Computer Information Systems course requirements consist of:

- CIS 4620 Mini/Micro Computer Applications
- CIS 4665 Distributed Data Processing and Networking
- CIS 3610 COBOL

These courses provide the student with a pragmatic and updated approach to computer

technology.

The Marketing requirements consist of the following courses:

BAdm 3480 Consumer & Marketing Behavior

BAdm 4470 Marketing Research

BAdm 4400 Marketing Management

These requirements are expected to provide the students with the basic marketing tools, which help in relating and satisfying the needs of the customer.

The capstone course:

CIS 4625 Marketing Computer Technology

#### NEW PROBLEMS IDENTIFICATION

The development of the course Marketing Computer Technology has met with surprising acceptance by both industry and academia. Such a reaction from both disciplines is unusual. Common goals between the two are usually apparent, but the approaches to these goals are seldom compatible.

The introduction of the CNC approach in marketing computer products has addressed many problems. At the same time, new issues have surfaced which need additional research. Some of these issues are:

- a) the perception of the role of consultant vs. that of salesperson,
- b) the trust factor in a computer need consulting relationship,
- c) costs associated with the long-term relationship between the customer and the computer need consultant,
- d) identification of customers' needs as a first step in consulting.

#### CONCLUSION

The goal of computer science and computer information systems programs has been to develop programmers or systems analysts. This goal was valid since the demand in the marketplace was for these particular skills. As computer applications are further identified and as the computer is accepted by populations other than the professional population, a new computer specialist is needed.



This new computer specialist, called a Computer Need Consultant, is expected to fulfill the general consumer's computer needs, as well as those of industry. In each case, consultation is increasingly becoming the preferred method of resolving problems related to computer applications.

To prepare the CNC to serve industry needs, it is recommended that schools develop graduates who have both technical knowledge and marketing skills. These individuals could have the option within their computer department of pursuing either the programming degree or the consulting degree.

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