

REAL WORLD E-COMMERCE: IMPORTING A JAPANESE USED CAR

Stephen Corich
Principal Lecturer
EIT Hawke's Bay
Taradale, Napier NZ
scorich@eit.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

I have always believed in using case studies to enhance the student learning experience, and I continually look for practical ways to engage students in the learning process. This year I saved several thousand dollars by importing a used car from Japan, and at the same time I used the process to provide an interesting real world case study for my e-commerce students.

The paper will be of interest to those who believe that case studies are a valuable teaching resource and wish to incorporate case studies into their teaching. The paper will also be of interest to those who might want to save a few thousand dollars when they purchase a replacement vehicle.

This paper investigates the contribution that real world case studies can make towards enhancing degree level courses, and provides a practical example of how importing a Japanese used car was used as the basis of an e-commerce course case study.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the pedagogy of case studies within the learning environment and traces the application of a real world case study to a second year E-Commerce degree course. The case study that was used as the basis for the e-commerce paper involved the identification

and purchase of a used car in Japan and its subsequent importation into New Zealand. The paper explains how the case study was incorporated into the course and concludes with a summary of observations from the course lecturer and students.

2. THE PEDAGOGY OF CASE STUDIES

The use of case studies is based on an educational philosophy, which associates knowledge directly with action (Boeher, 1995). The case method is based on a principle that real education is an experiential experience that consists of a combination of learning experiences.

Supporters of the use of case studies in education adhere to two fundamental principles. The first is that the best-learned lessons are ones in which students discover for themselves through their own struggles, and the second is that the most useful kinds of understanding and judgment cannot be taught but must be learned through practical experience (Volepe, 2000).

When instructors use case studies they are using real-world problems as a platform that can challenge students to learn skills that will be appropriate to deal with the practical problems they will face in the work place. Case methods allow students to work through a problem and reach a deeper understanding of concepts than they would have if they had only read a text or listened to lectures.

Velenchik (1995) highlights issues addressed by the use of case studies. Case studies motivate students to learn by providing a platform where tools are needed to solve problems. Students then start looking for the tools rather than expecting to have them delivered. Case studies also encourage students to apply the theory, placing a focus on analysis and evaluation, enabling students the opportunity to identify limitations of theory.

The emphasis that case studies place on analysis and evaluation, helps students move up the cognitive skills ladder from the low level skills of comprehension to the higher level skills of analysis and evaluation. The case method provides a stimulating environment within which to develop the cognitive skills in learners.

3. THE CASE: IMPORTING A USED CAR

Opportunities to use real-world case studies exist all around us, the idea of using the importing process for a Japanese used car for an E-Commerce case study arose when one of the family cars failed a warrant of fitness and a decision was made to find a replacement. Since purchasing the car other possibilities for similar case studies have arisen, including a digital camera purchase and the purchase of a mini-disk player.

The process of identifying, buying, transporting and receiving delivery of a Japanese import covered aspects that impacted on many of the learning outcomes covered by the second year degree level E-Commerce course. Since the actual process of importing a car allows savings of several thousand dollars to be made, and most students are interested in owning a car, the topic immediately caught the imagination of the course participants. When the company in Japan who purchased the vehicle heard that the importing process was being used as a case study, they expressed a desire to receive a summary of the student's findings and have indicated that they would be interested in redesigning their existing E-Commerce infrastructure as a result. This interest shown by the Japanese exporters provides an opportunity for a further case study for the third year Web Application Development course.

4. ADOPTION OF THE CASE METHOD

Volpe (2000) suggests that there is no single approach to case teaching. Instead there are different approaches that work for different people in different situations. He also suggests that there are two main

ways of using case studies. The first is to use the case study to support and illustrate lectures and seminars and the second is to use the case study to challenge students to grapple with the decision making process, formulate a strategy and come to class ready to explain and defend their strategy. The car importation case study gave the opportunity to use both approaches.

The current importation process for a Japanese used car is an example of partial

E-Commerce, it involves a combination of manual and digital transactions many of which are unrelated. The most significant steps in the car importation process are listed below:

- Identify the type of car to import
- Identify a suitable Japanese exporter
- Negotiate a price range
- Pay a deposit
- Purchase a car
- Pay for balance of car and transportation
- Track shipping progress
- Receive shipping/import documents
- Obtain MAF clearance
- Pay shipping costs
- Pay GST
- Uplift car from port
- Arrange VIN allocation and LTSA clearance
- Arrange registration and warrant of fitness
- Arrange insurance
- Drive car

The idea of importing a used car from Japan immediately caught the attention of students when the case study was introduced at the beginning of the course. Students were kept up to date as the car was identified, purchased, paid for and shipped. They became actively involved in critiquing each step of the process, looking for opportunities to streamline and improve the importation procedures. As the course progressed, students considered the various aspects involved in the car importation process, applying the theory covered in class to the real world process of vehicle importing.

The case study could be applied to most of the topics identified in the e-commerce course prescription. Topics such as business planning, e-tailing, buyer behaviour, security, business to business transactions, electronic data interchange and

electronic funds transfer were considered and discussed with reference to the case study.

The case study also formed the basis of the practical assessment for the course. Students were asked to conduct a detailed analysis of the existing procedures and plan an e-commerce infrastructure that meets the needs of both the exporters and the prospective car importers.

5. REACTION TO THE CASE STUDY

Compared to previous offerings of the e-commerce course, students appeared to be more involved and a higher standard of assessment work was produced. Each week students came to class and demanded an update on the process, taking part in car searches, fund transfer investigations, shipping enquiries and price comparisons. When the car finally arrived the celebration was a bit like that associated with the delivery of a baby, with students crowding around the car and several students asking for a test drive.

Course evaluations conducted after the course, verified the success of the application of a real world case study, with overall satisfaction ratings being significantly higher than earlier offerings. The majority of students made positive references to the case study, expressing appreciation about real-world aspects of the course.

The quality of work produced for the practical assessment was higher than in the past. Probably influenced by the knowledge that copies of the better scripts would be sent to the exporters in Japan. The impact of the case study was also evident in the final written assessment, with many explanations being related to the various aspects of the importation processes.

As a method of instruction, the case study provided a skeleton on which to attach theory and glue the various components of the course into a cohesive unit. The increased student interest helped make the course a pleasure to teach and the savings made by importing the car provided a pleasing financial return.

The findings tend to confirm educational theory, that case studies encourage students to learn for themselves, providing a platform that allows students to work through problems and apply theory to providing meaningful solutions.

6. POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE STUDY

This particular case study has an additional benefit that it can now be applied to another course and possibly form the basis for a major project for a third year student. The exporters have indicated that they would like their current e-commerce infrastructure redesigned to make their business a more attractive proposition to prospective customers. The information gathered as a result of e-commerce students investigations will provide the background to developing a technical solution as part of a third year Web Application Development course.

Positive student reaction to the use of the case study suggest that the method deserves further investigation, and opportunities exist to extend the car importation case study so that it can be used in upcoming first year and second year data communications courses.

With this case study, the course lecturer heavily directed its application in the classroom environment. The lecturer performed the activities associated with the car importation, led discussion and identified the areas where the case study could be applied to theory. Scope exists to investigate the use of a less directive approach, one in which students undertake an e-commerce activity and look for ways to apply theory to practice.

7. REFERENCES

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USING DEGREE COURSES TO BUILD INDUSTRY RELATIONSHIPS

Stephen Corich
Allister McLay
EIT Hawke's Bay
Taradale, Napier, NZ
scorich@eit.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

In 2002 the Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) Hawke's Bay decided to build a purpose built information technology suite and at the same time upgrade its existing internal network infrastructure. As a result of the subsequent tendering process Allied Telesyn was identified as the preferred provider of networking hardware.

When the staff of the Information Technology section of EIT discovered who Allied Telesyn were, they looked for opportunities to develop meaningful relationships beyond hardware purchase and support. Areas investigated included building naming rights, student sponsorship, industry course delivery and graduate employment opportunities.

This paper traces the ongoing relationships and explores how opportunities to build meaningful industry connections can be established within the existing programmes that a tertiary institute offers.

The paper backgrounds Allied Telesyn and the services they offer and traces the steps that were taken to establish a new course within the existing degree structure. The paper also examines other opportunities for cooperation between the real world and the academic world and looks at the future potential for ongoing relationships.

We believe that such relationships are essential for institutes that intend to offer relevant tertiary qualifications that are geared towards meeting the needs of perspective employers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade there has been an explosion of industry-based qualifications, such as CISCO CCNA and Microsoft MCSE. Tertiary institutes have explored ways to integrate these courses into their existing qualifications and at previous conferences several papers have been presented that outline how different institutes have managed this process. The Eastern Institute of Technology (EIT) has taken a slightly different approach, which has resulted in the development of a special relationship with networking solutions provider, Allied Telesyn. EIT has undertaken a number of initiatives including the integration of elements of Allied Telesyn courses into its Bachelor of Computing Systems degree. The aim of this particular initiative is to produce graduates with skills that will enable them to have an advantage over computing graduates from similar institutes when seeking employment at Allied Telesyn.

This paper introduces Allied Telesyn and traces the events that led to the establishment of a special relationship between Allied Telesyn and EIT. It describes the nature of the relationship and explains the processes followed by EIT to develop a new third year data communications course which was tailor made to include areas of Allied Telesyn training materials previously not covered within existing EIT courses. The paper concludes, looking at possibilities for the future and suggests that there are opportunities for tertiary institutes to develop meaningful relationships with major industry players.

2. ALLIED TELESYN

Allied Telesyn International is a technology company that claims to be able connect the world with affordable, highly reliable networking technology and products.