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## **Market Analysis of a Student Agribusiness Organization as a Planning and Educational Tool**

**Dawn D. Thilmany and Dana L. Hoag**

Although marketing principles and strategies are taught in all major agribusiness management programs in the country, few agribusiness student groups use these very principles in the planning of their own activities. This article describes a market research project developed by the AgriBusiness Association at Colorado State University (CSU) as an example of how to integrate coursework with an undergraduate agribusiness organization's program of activities. In addition to reinforcing marketing principles learned at CSU, the project taught students the importance of setting objectives, research design, and data analysis. Many of the findings were used to plan and improve the club.

**Key Words:** agribusiness clubs, marketing, undergraduate students

Undergraduate courses in agribusiness and agricultural marketing are designed to teach students how to apply economic and business principles in their jobs when they graduate. Nevertheless, students and their employers are telling faculty that graduates have difficulty making the leap from what they learned in the classroom to what they need in order to be able to do their jobs (Andelt, Barrett, and Boss-hamer, 1997). This issue has led to an increased use of real-world case studies in courses (Peterson, 1996; Carlson and Schodt, 1995) and also supports the inclusion of various internships and independent study projects in agribusiness curriculum.

As universities struggle to balance teaching economics and business principles with real-world applications, agribusiness and marketing programs may have overlooked a powerful opportunity in their own backyards. Although marketing principles and strategies are taught in all major agribusiness management programs in the

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This article includes findings from a survey conducted by the Colorado State University AgriBusiness Association. The authors wish to express their appreciation to the student leaders and research assistants on the project, including Kevin Heikes, JoLynn Lenz, Aron Yoder, Matt Lochwood, Clint Davis, and Marylu Smith (current and former CSU undergraduate agribusiness students); Megan Bruch and Jennifer Knudson (past and current ABA presidents) contributed valuable insights as to how the club has integrated these findings into activities over the past two school years. An anonymous reviewer also provided helpful comments in framing the market analysis. However, any remaining errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

country (Larson, 1996), few agribusiness student groups use these very principles in the planning, packaging, and marketing of their own activities. That is, most clubs and organizations have not asked how marketing principles apply to researching and developing the market for their own organizations.

Recognizing this irony, the Colorado State University AgriBusiness Association (ABA) decided to develop a market research, analysis, and planning project focused on its own potential customers, the undergraduate majors in agribusiness. The project was designed as a method to increase participation in and satisfaction of ABA activities (through marketing), as well as to reinforce the concepts learned in classes among those involved in the marketing analysis and planning. In essence, the ABA is a product with marketable attributes. Just like any other product, the ABA's attributes can be changed and marketed to better meet consumer needs. And just like any other product, one should begin by setting goals and building an understanding of the market through a survey of current and potential consumers.

Following Kotler (2000), a marketing plan was developed to address the current ABA marketing situation through market analysis, analyzing opportunities and issues, and setting goals and objectives (for the market plan as well as overall organization). Students involved in the project registered for an independent study experience led by the authors of this article. We used several analytical and pedagogical techniques to develop the market plan, but our primary effort involved a market research survey of agribusiness majors and minors at Colorado State University (CSU). While the analysis and planning portions of the project worked very well, the action plan and monitoring efforts were limited due to a high turnover rate among club members and advisors.

We present our experiences here so that other clubs may benefit from our successes and learn from our limitations. The market research, analysis, and goal-setting provided an excellent learning opportunity for the ABA students at Colorado State University and a unique opportunity for professional development. However, we also discovered the necessity for including details in our action plan concerning how to pass on information when turnover of both membership and leadership is high. We should note that the action plan discussed here is based on our renewed efforts to pass on information to our successors, not on our original plan, which was not adopted by the ABA in the year following our study.

### **Marketing Plans: A Framework for the Project**

Following Kotler's seminal marketing management text, several elements are needed in an effective marketing plan. A good marketing plan should include an assessment of the current marketing situation, an analysis of opportunities and issues, stated objectives, a marketing strategy, action programs, a projected profit-and-loss statement, and the controls implemented to monitor the progress of the action plan. Because this plan was developed (and its results intended) for a student organization, some adaptations to Kotler's framework were necessary. For instance, the not-for-profit status, as well as the unique financial situation of a student group, limited the

scope of the financial analysis, although a small analysis of willingness to pay dues was included in the survey instrument.

Beyond the analysis and objectives that are fully addressed in this project, the implementation steps in the marketing plan were compromised by the fact that turnover in membership and leadership in student organizations is significant. Specifically, the members of the student research team were not comfortable dictating an action plan or method of monitoring progress to the future officer team and membership, since most of them would no longer be active. It may be common for planning to be more successful than implementation, as the former is probably easier than the latter. In the case of ABA, however, our continuity problem between planning and implementation was acute because almost the entire officer team (and roughly half of the membership) changes from year to year.

Given these concerns, and the unique characteristics of market planning for a student organization, the marketing plan undertaken by the students focused on goal-setting and market assessment activities with some general thought and discussion about future implementation. Moreover, this situation was considered an educational opportunity to help the students understand the unique dynamics of student clubs—most notably, organization objectives that are not linked to profits and the challenges presented by leadership and membership (customer) turnover. Our action plan was modified a year after project completion when we recognized the difficulties involved in passing on the planning results to our successors.

## **Market Situation**

### *Microenvironment*

During 1998–99, the club had 20 dues-paying members, including seven members of the officer team. Although there were several well-attended programs put on during the year, attendance at meetings and some events was weak. The officer team turns over annually, and faculty advisers hold two-year terms, so managerial history of the organization is fairly limited. There is no formal reporting or planning process in place for any activity, but rather, most information is shared informally among the immediate past officer or committee chair and the student heading the activity for the coming year. This issue is especially problematic when past officers or chairs graduate and are unavailable to consult during subsequent years.

### *Macroenvironment*

The target market for the club is the approximately 200 majors currently enrolled in the agribusiness program at Colorado State University. For some of the professional development programs and presentations on specific agribusiness issues, the club would like to target all students in the College of Agricultural Sciences (approximately 2,000 in 1999). There are currently 12 active student organizations in the college, but no others that focus on agribusiness. However, active chapters of the

National AgriMarketing Association (NAMA) and Collegiate Farm Bureau have begun in the Agricultural and Resource Economics Department in the past two years, and these groups potentially compete for agribusiness majors. Currently, NAMA is a complementary organization to ABA, requiring joint membership. Some members have sought to separate the clubs, and if this effort is successful, more competition would be created (as is currently the case with the Collegiate Farm Bureau).

### **Opportunity and Issue Analysis**

We spent much of the first third of the independent study working with students to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the ABA and to prioritize what questions they really wanted answered. These initial stages of the market analysis proved to be more educational than the students had expected. Developing a Strength-Weakness/Opportunity-Threat (SWOT) analysis for the club led the students to conduct a comparative analysis based on their experiences with other campus groups, and deep reflection about why the club operated the way it did. Additionally, students discussed what types of activities and opportunities were currently absent for students of the department and in the Agricultural Sciences College as a whole.

Strengths of the club include a strong core of dedicated members and officers, support from the department head and faculty (advising and financial), and a few club activities with past proven success. The weaknesses included small turnout at meetings, poor awareness about the club, and low attendance at some programs targeted to the whole department and college.

Given the current situation, there are numerous opportunities for the club since the potential for increased membership is favorable (based on the growing number of majors in agribusiness at CSU). Other positive factors include a lack of alternative professional development opportunities for those in the Agricultural Sciences College with business interests, and the recent formation of two complementary organizations with which to coordinate (NAMA and Collegiate Farm Bureau). Nevertheless, these new organizations also could represent a threat if ABA objectives and activities do not harmonize well with those of NAMA and Collegiate Farm Bureau. Additional challenges include increasing time demands among college students (most of whom work) and the ability to reach transfer students when they arrive on campus since they make up a large share of the agribusiness majors.

Arguably the biggest obstacle faced by the club is a lack of information about the preferences and concerns of its potential customers (the agribusiness majors). Consequently, the team decided that an in-depth market research project would be an essential element of this marketing action plan. In addition to collecting more specific information on the market environment and consumer preferences, the survey developed for the project requested that potential members rate the likely effectiveness of, and their interest in, specific club and marketing activities (club-sponsored programs and publicity). In short, the research team agreed that conducting market research was a valuable step in developing an effective marketing plan for future use

by officers (as it provides information and some goals without specific objectives and actions they will be directed to implement).

### **Organizational Objectives**

The development of a set of realistic objectives for the club was not a trivial undertaking, and required the students to negotiate among themselves about what constitutes a “good club.” The primary goal of many agribusiness student groups is to attract a significant number of high-quality students to become stable members and consistent participants in various activities. The students in this group, however, concluded that the number of members may not be as important as the makeup of the membership. There are already many clubs on campus competing for students’ time. Perhaps it is better to find a niche and let those people with other interests go to other clubs. For example, one of the clubs at CSU with the most members is known for its focus on socializing and making friends. Although social opportunities can still be integrated into club activities, the ABA might do well if it offers a forum that will appeal to those students more serious about professional development.

Another interesting result from these initial discussions was the realization that time constraints from competing clubs, studying, work, and/or leisure may prohibit participation regardless of club effectiveness. The ABA charges very little for dues, and many activities are free to all students, yet attendance falls below the officers’ expectations. So, rather than competing on the basis of price or cost (as would be customary with a traditional good), clubs may be competing with students’ other time commitments. Thus, marketing such activities may need to be based on proving the value of the activity is worth the time spent, rather than the price paid. Increasing the value/time spent provides two opportunities to improve the ABA—by making the club more valuable or by reducing perceived time conflicts and inefficiencies.

In summary, the objectives established for the marketing/research plan were as follows:

- to identify an optimal set of ABA activities;
- to investigate optimal club and meeting structure; and
- to determine how to better target market segments (members, potential members, potential program attendees).

With respect to current and potential members, the club should determine attractive activities, appropriate meeting styles, times, and agenda items, as well as the dues students are willing to pay. For the broader market (less dedicated members and nonmember participants), it is also important to determine what nights public events should be held. Finally, for each market segment it is important to analyze how effective past publicity efforts have been, and what type of publicity each segment prefers.

## **Marketing Strategy**

Most of the marketing strategy and planning revolved around a survey of our clientele. The research team members separated into small groups according to their interests and areas of specialization (i.e., new activities, meeting format, and publicity) to develop specific questions, criteria, and the format of the survey. After defining the objectives, the students were encouraged to articulate their theories as to what strategies would motivate students to join or actively participate in the ABA so that such theories could be tested with the survey results.

The various theories were compiled (and in some cases generalized) to develop a framework for the survey analysis. The survey was divided into six sections by theme: (1) personal information, (2) club involvement, (3) ABA member information, (4) nonmember questions, (5) club format, and (6) building awareness. Within each of these themes, the survey respondents were categorized into three groups for comparative purposes: (1) *current* members of ABA, (2) *likely* nonmembers<sup>1</sup> (people already members of some other organization at CSU), and (3) *unlikely* nonmembers (those in no CSU clubs or organizations). The assumption was that students who hold no club memberships comprise a different marketing target than those who are members in clubs other than ABA.

Surveys were mailed to all Colorado State University agribusiness majors during spring 1999. To increase the survey response rate, the research team targeted Agricultural and Resource Economics Department courses with large numbers of majors and handed out surveys in those courses. (Respondents who filled in surveys during class were asked to disregard the duplicate mailed survey.) Although surveys were not mailed to them, any students minoring in the targeted classes were also asked to fill out the surveys. Nonmajors were requested not to take the survey, because we assumed our own majors would be our primary customers.

A total of 120 responses were received. Of these, 15 were returned by curriculum minors. The remaining 105 respondents represent a little over half of the 204 majors in the department in 1999.

### *Customer Profile*

Student characteristics are summarized in table 1 for members, likely nonmembers, and unlikely nonmembers. Members represented 17% of the responses, while nonmembers constituted 83% of the sample. (Given the current ABA membership rate is 10% of all majors, these percentages signal overrepresentation for members among survey respondents.) About 60% of nonmember responses were classified as those who were potential joiners (see description above) and 40% were classified as unlikely to join.

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<sup>1</sup> Students who were active in other clubs, but not ABA, were considered more likely to join ABA than those students who do not usually participate in any clubs.

**Table 1. Sample Population Characteristics of Members and Nonmembers**

Characteristic	Population	Members	Nonmembers	
			Likely	Unlikely
	!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	(%)	!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	!!!!!!!!
Percentage of population	—	17	49	34
<b>Academic Rank:</b>				
Freshman	11	15	7	5
Sophomore	21	10	14	12
Junior	35	30	33	46
Senior	34	45	47	37
<b>Age:</b>				
17–19	NA	20	16	12
20–21	NA	45	53	39
22–24	NA	30	29	39
Over 24	NA	5	2	10
<b>Other:</b>				
Colorado resident	NA	85	71	76
Transfer student	50	40	33	66*
Respondent is male	63	50	53	51

Notes: Single asterisk (\*) denotes significantly different from Members at the 10% level. Percentages may not sum to one due to rounding.

Member characteristics are quite consistent with likely member characteristics, with a few exceptions. From this sample, it appears that seniors are more likely to be involved in a club (including ABA) by the time they reach their final year at CSU, while juniors are the most unlikely members. It is important to note that the population of agribusiness majors is biased toward upper-level students because of the high share of transfer students the department receives as juniors. The survey results suggest these transfer students are not getting involved in any clubs until they are seniors, as evidenced by the drop in the proportion of unlikely seniors. Thus, from the unlikely nonmembers group, there appears to be an opportunity to recruit juniors at the time of transfer to CSU. The fact that the number of unlikely members who are seniors is disproportionately lower than for juniors might indicate there is a transition period before some of these students get involved, or that job market concerns lead seniors to get more involved. Perhaps this presents an opportunity to target transfer students sooner once they arrive on campus.

*Competition for Time*

Student availability is an important aspect of the ABA’s success. Many other demands can compete with club activities, including work and school. Nearly two-thirds of all students are employed, working on average 13.4 hours per week. Job responsibilities make it difficult to attend meetings held at night, while classes make



it difficult to attend meetings in the daytime. Nearly 90% of students have a course load exceeding 13 credit hours per semester, and 40% have an overload with more than 16 credit hours. Table 2 reports when students prefer to attend meetings and activities. There does not appear to be a weeknight that is significantly more open than another for potential members. However, Wednesday evenings do seem to present the greatest opportunity for holding events targeted at the general student population (table 3). It is interesting to note that 73% of ABA members were available on weekends compared to none of the unlikely nonmembers and 10% of likely nonmembers (table 2).

### *Preferences and Needs*

One of the ABA's most important considerations is developing a good product. This includes activities and efficient administration of the meetings. Figure 1 illustrates the various student groups' priorities for the types of activities ABA could offer. Among the members and general student body, professional development opportunities were perceived as the most important. Leadership and networking opportunities were similarly ranked among respondents. Interestingly, there is little difference in opinion about activities among the categories of students. This is less true with social events, which the members prioritized as high, while such events are in less demand among other respondent groups.

Figure 2 displays rankings of student interest in more specific activities the ABA was considering for the 1999–2000 school year. Member interest in each of these activities was relatively higher than that of the rest of the sample, with little difference among each activity. Those activities with the highest interest from students include a trip to the Western Stock Show in Denver, a leadership training workshop, a Web-based resumé service, and motivational speakers. These preferences are not surprising given the findings from figure 1, and serve to reinforce the officers' ideas of what attracts students within those general areas of interest. More importantly, each of these activities is of great interest to the potential members ABA hopes to recruit and more fully engage in activities over the next year.

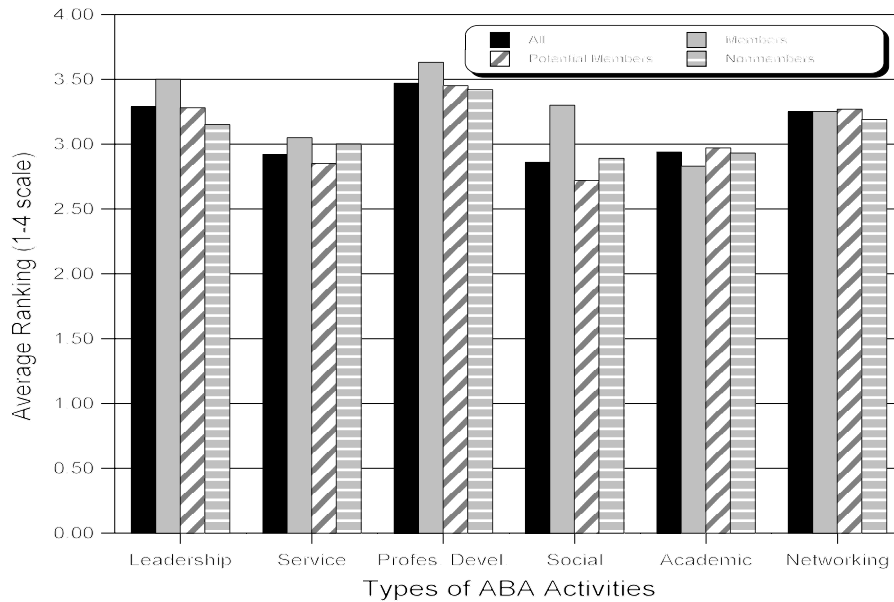
While the nonmember group of students generally expressed less interest, it does appear these activities would induce a fair number of them to attend. Surprisingly, as shown in figure 3, nonmembers indicated more willingness to assist with some of the potential activities than did the potential members ABA hopes to target. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, likely and unlikely nonmembers were distinguished in our analysis according to the student's level of activity; thus, unlikely nonmembers have fewer club-related time commitments. This may afford them more time to commit to activities of particular interest to them. Although these students have not actively participated in other college or community activities, perhaps a group of nonmembers would be willing to join a club if it offers the appropriate mix of activities. The ability to engage unlikely nonmembers in organizational efforts may also present an opportunity to make them active in the general association.

**Table 2. Meeting Scheduling and Style Preferences Reported by Members and Nonmembers**

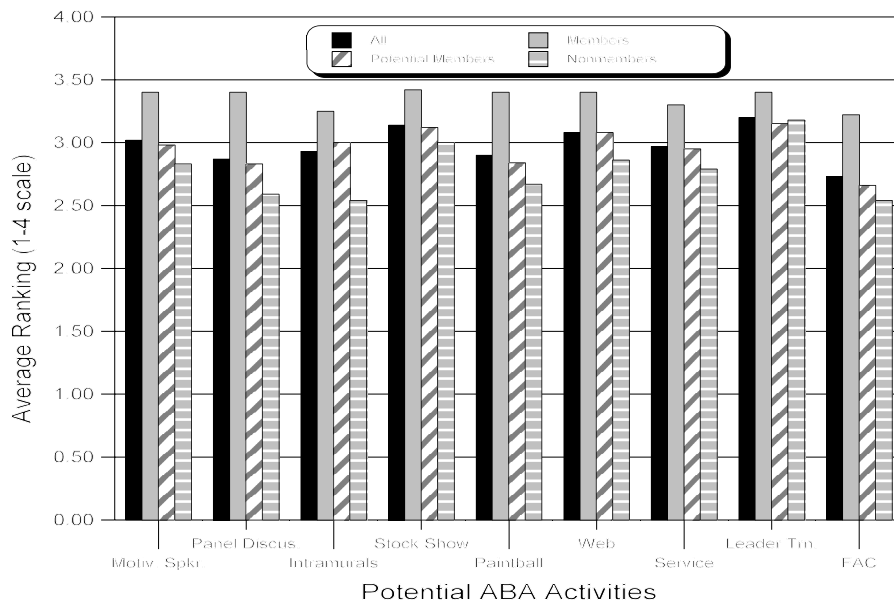
Preference	Members	Nonmembers	
		Likely	Unlikely
	!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (%)!!!!!!!!!!!!!!		
<b>Day of the Week:</b>			
Monday	45	56	23
Tuesday	20	49	32
Wednesday	45	54	45
Thursday	60	51	0
Friday–Sunday	73	10	0
<b>Time of Day:</b>			
Evenings	75	88	83
Other	25	12	17
<b>Length of Meeting:</b>			
½ hour	15	20	18
¾ hour	40	38	13
1 hour	45	43	63
1¼ hour or more	0	0	7
<b>Leadership Meeting Style:</b>			
Single head/chair	25	NA	NA
Group-led/discussion	80	NA	NA
<b>Attendance:</b>			
Hardly ever	10	NA	NA
One-quarter of meetings	10	NA	NA
One-half of meetings	15	NA	NA
Three-quarters of meetings	20	NA	NA
Most meetings	40	NA	NA

**Table 3. Evening Availability of Members and Nonmembers for Meetings and Events, by Day of Week**

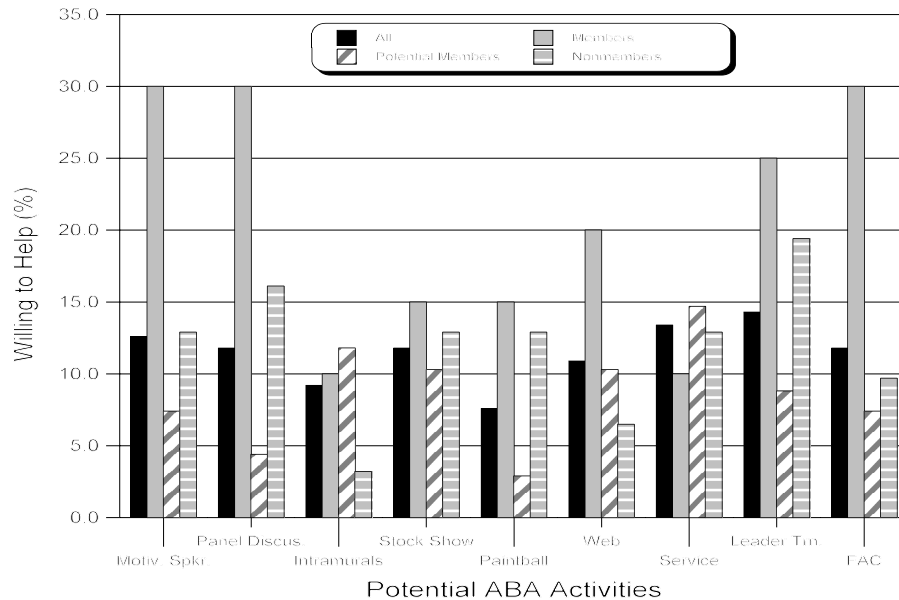
Respondent Groups	DAY OF WEEK						
	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
	!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (%)!!!!!!!!!!!!!!						
All (average)	45	39	50	39	17	16	21
Members	45	20	45	60	65	55	100
Likely Nonmembers	56	49	54	51	10	12	7
Unlikely Nonmembers	23	32	45	0	0	0	0



**Figure 1. Priority rankings of types of ABA activities, by membership status (1–4 scale, where 4 = most important)**



**Figure 2. Rankings of student interest in potential ABA activities, by membership status (1–4 scale, where 4 = most important)**



**Figure 3. Willingness to help with potential ABA activities, by membership status**

Finally, students will judge the value of the ABA meetings by how they are run. As shown in table 2, most students prefer to have meetings in the evenings that last between three-quarters of an hour and one hour, regardless of whether they are members or not. About 20% prefer to limit meetings to one-half hour. More than three-quarters of the members reported attending over half the meetings, indicating some degree of satisfaction. The same number of members reported preferring a group discussion type of meeting style over one led by a chair.

*Promotion*

Participation in the ABA is also a function of how effectively the organization is marketed. One-third of nonmembers reported they know little about the ABA, and less than one-quarter of all respondents said their advisor told them about the organization. Figure 4 shows what types of publicity students believe would be the most effective, with responses categorized by those who have heard about the ABA (did know) and those who have not (did not know). Of the students who did not know about ABA prior to the survey, 90% believe a letter from the association would be an effective way to tell them about the ABA and its activities. Approximately 75% of these same students indicated that information provided through advisors would be helpful. Based on these findings, it appears that the two best methods for initially informing unaware, inactive majors about ABA are by written communication and through contacts by advisors.

The responses related to effective publicity methods were also analyzed across member and nonmember groups, as illustrated in figure 5. Letters and advisor contact are effective options for all types of students, especially nonmembers. However, for activities that focus on members, the Web page, friends, and letters could all be effective. More importantly, the results of the survey reveal that publicity methods can be effectively targeted, depending on the type of student ABA is trying to reach and the activity being publicized.

### **Action Plan**

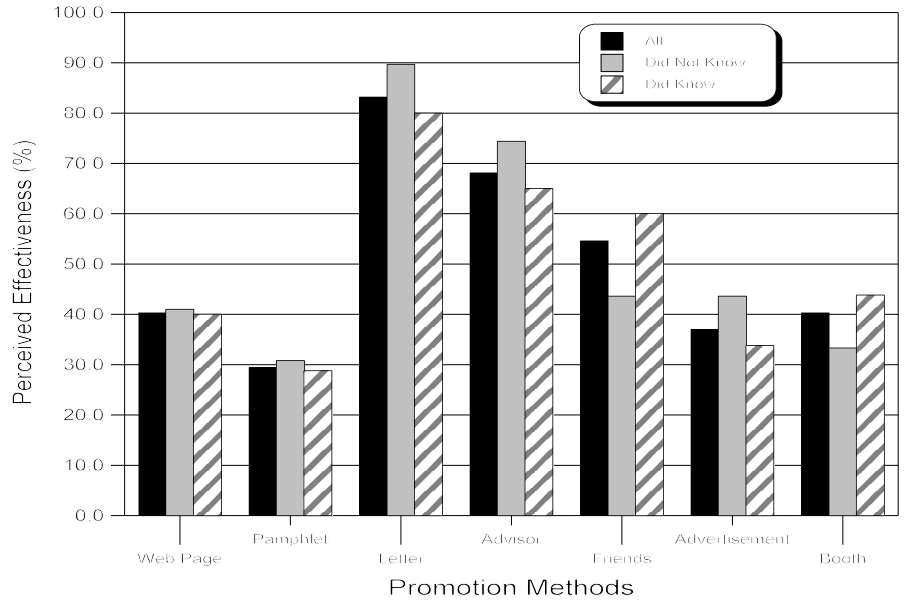
Several helpful lessons were learned from the SWOT analysis, student discussions, and the survey. First, a broad action plan and set of objectives were defined. The club's primary objectives as set forth in the action plan are:

- to increase the membership in ABA,
- to increase the participation level of the average member, and
- to increase the participation level of all agricultural business majors in select activities organized by the ABA.

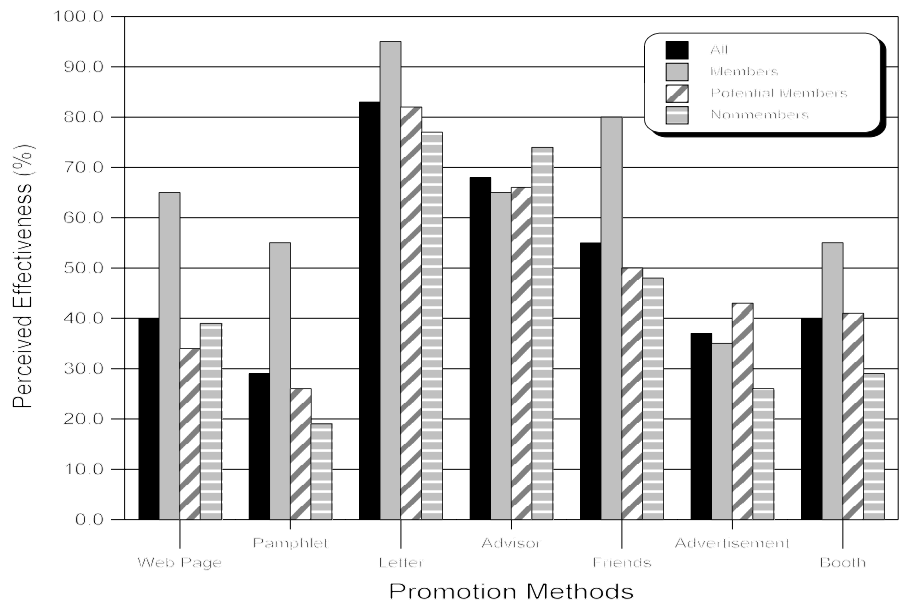
The action plan recommended that during the 1999–2000 school year, both professional development and leadership activities should be developed to address all three market segments listed in the objectives. Further, to keep the membership happy, social events should continue to be held as well. Specifically, for social events and professional development, a trip to the Western Stock Show (including tours) and a meeting featuring a leadership speaker should be organized to attract member and nonmember students. To keep members involved, Friday Afternoon Club (FAC) and paintball social events, as well as all previous and potential professional development opportunities, could be explored. In addition, popular activities such as the leadership training workshop should be continued and better promoted.

We learned through this market research project that we do a poor job of promoting the club. Consequently, our action plan includes the placement of a personal invitation in every student's academic file for the purpose of encouraging student advisors to talk about the club during advising sessions. This does not solve the problem of recruiting new transfer students, however, since they will not see an advisor until well after the school year begins. Yet, survey respondents indicated they would like to receive a personal letter or a personal invitation from a member.

Finally, the meeting structure needs some attention. While survey responses revealed little preference about which night of the week the meetings were held, there was strong agreement that meetings should be under three-quarters of an hour. Most students also preferred to have a meeting run by the group instead of led by a chair. (One of the other CSU clubs whose meeting structure we examined runs its meetings by committee, thereby keeping everyone involved.)



**Figure 4. Perceived effectiveness of ABA promotion methods, by those who have heard about ABA and those who have not**



**Figure 5. Perceived effectiveness of promotion methods for ABA activities, by membership status**

The recommendations discussed above were formulated in consultation with the students who originally conducted the survey and with the ABA leadership in the following year (1999–2000). Yet, the action plan was not directly followed. Meetings were held between the market development group and the new leadership (officers) to pass on the marketing plan in a more formal fashion. The ideas were received positively and used to target new activities, but were not integrated into meetings during 1999–2000. Most of the new activities met attendance goals, but poor meeting attendance toward the end of the year indicates that meeting suggestions also need to be adopted. Current officers and members of ABA are attempting to implement the meeting suggestions in the 2000–2001 school year.

### **Financial Evaluation**

The ABA is a not-for-profit organization, so profitability analysis would be inappropriate in this plan. However, there are several financial issues that may affect the marketability of the club. In terms of dues, cost did not seem to be an issue. A question on willingness to pay dues found that most survey respondents (96 out of 120) were willing to pay up to \$10 per semester. Only 9% of nonmembers indicated they had no interest in joining ABA, and only 5% said the \$5 dues were a problem, while about half said they had no time for ABA. Based on these responses, the cost of *time* appears to be a more important factor. Therefore, the club should be careful to conduct efficient and timely meetings and programs for this market.

Although finances do not seem to be a constraint for the ABA, several of the activities preferred by the market would require financial backing to organize. For this reason, one of the recommendations of the action plan is to work more closely with the treasurer and finance committee in establishing budgets for programming (and raising funds to increase the scope and scale of some activities).

### **Monitoring and Controls: Adoption by ABA Officers in 1999–2000 and 2000–2001**

As mentioned previously, it does not seem appropriate to dictate to future club leadership how to implement or monitor the marketing activities and goals outlined here. However, the 1999–2000 ABA officers did adopt and implement several of the suggestions made in the marketing plan. Although no meeting style change was made during 1999–2000, a switch to shorter, group-oriented (rather than formal) meetings was adopted during the 2000–2001 academic year. This change has been viewed quite favorably by members, as evidenced by higher attendance during the fall semester than in the previous year.

Given the finding of our 1998–99 survey that ABA promotional strategies had been ineffective, officer teams in the two successive academic years used more direct communication with agribusiness majors to attract members, including direct mailings, use of advisors, and visits to classes with large numbers of majors. More

specifically, the club targeted freshman and sophomore students by sending representatives to the Agricultural College Freshman Seminar and other relevant courses to attract members at an earlier point in their university career. Finally, two of the most popular ABA activities, a visit to the National Western Stock Show and a panel of industry speakers (see figure 2), were undertaken in the past two academic years.

We are fortunate that club officers have been open to suggestions, but uncertainty as to how future leadership will feel about planning done before their tenure points attention to a potential problem. Planning is easier than implementation, and implementation is easier if there is a driving force (including someone with a vested interest in the marketing plan). In the case of ABA, there are few incentives to implement changes, as students are primarily interested in minimizing efforts to network and be involved in a “resumé-building” activity. As results suggest, current members do see the club as a social outlet as well, but this focus does little to encourage active development and refinement of new programs and structure of meetings.

## **Conclusions**

The CSU agribusiness marketing team understood that the marketing process consists of analyzing opportunities, researching target markets, designing marketing strategies, and planning programs, as well as organizing, implementing, and controlling the marketing effort. Yet, the implementation phase posed a dilemma since new officers would need to undertake and oversee any suggested programs. This limited the scope and scale of the marketing plan. Still, the process and results of the market analysis of the agribusiness group are of interest for two reasons. First, the analysis allows for a general overview of what product attributes (group activities) are important to agribusiness majors—an important issue for any department whose undergraduate group has small, dwindling, or inactive membership. Second, the process of conducting such a study provides an excellent exercise in applied problem-solving that clubs and departments may want to undertake as a way to academically and professionally challenge students.

Because of potential pitfalls in monitoring across years (and sets of officers and advisors), the study results were shared with incoming faculty advisors and club officers to encourage the development of an individualized monitoring system to suit their group management style. This may include a more informal survey of students to address market issues of greatest concern to them, or to judge whether the changes implemented are considered positive by new and continuing members. As noted above, the new leadership adopted many of the suggestions of our action plan, even if other findings were put aside.

One of the major objectives of the survey effort turned out to be identifying the value per time spent. Most question responses related to satisfaction indicated students liked the way the club is currently run and like the products it has to offer. Although the product does seem to be satisfactory, there were a number of suggestions for improvement, such as moving the meeting date to Wednesday and using



a group-run format. About 15% of the student respondents said they cannot be involved in ABA because of other club commitments. However, about 13% reported they did not become involved because they did not have contact with someone familiar with the club.

The case for including real-world analysis and examples into agribusiness curriculum has been well made, and this study describes one innovative example of how to develop a marketing project to which students can relate. The findings also illustrate the potential for strategic planning and professional development that such a study offers to students. In addition to developing a better understanding of the interests and needs of peers, it allowed the students to frame questions, format a survey, and decide on methods of analysis for a market research project.

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