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Competitions with electronic simulators for Windows Android as marketing tools of academic institutions

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COMPETITIONS WITH ELECTRONIC SIMULATORS FOR WINDOWS & ANDROID AS MARKETING TOOLS OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction

Advertising university education is not simple. In marketing this kind of economic activity is considered as services and usually promoting it appears much more difficult than promoting goods. The reason seems obvious: since showing goods in advertisements and making a visual presentation of their advantages is easy, services (and particularly educational services) being an incorporeal property are hard to photograph, videotape and even describe in a convincing manner. This is the reason why the advertisements of the majority of universities are so non-efficient and, at the same time, all almost the same. They all claim perfect teachers, cool ambiance as well as interesting lectures, but how to convince about it candidates who hesitate before signing up for an university?

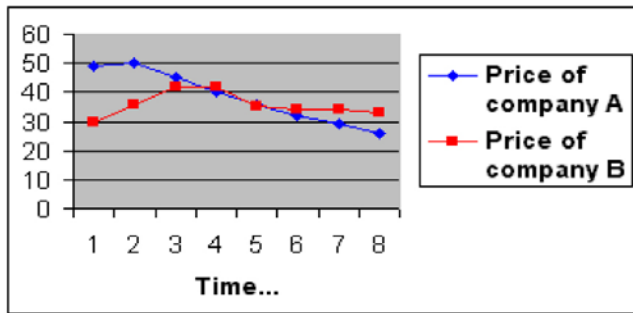
Warsaw branch of Institut Français de Gestion – a Paris located business school was chronologically the first educational institution in Poland which in 1990 introduced a full MBA (Master of Business Application) program. After a few years of operation this school experienced a growing pressure from her Polish competitors and, at the same time, a progressive erosion of the efficiency of traditional advertising. Searching a better and new marketing tool was its natural consequence and finally it was decided to use in such role customers' competitions based on electronic simulators.

These computer applications are widely used in many academic institutions. They allow students to manage virtual enterprises, competing against other virtual companies run by their colleagues and acting on the same market. In those business games the computer is usually fully passive and its role is limited only to making calculations. The simulation players act by periods (called also stages or cycles), corresponding to consecutive years (or other fixed periods of time) of company operation. Usually there are 5 to 10 of them, leading to a final summary screen, where the results of different teams are compared and the winner is declared.

This system implies that the decisions of all students are synchronized i.e. the period N cannot be started before all simulation players finish the period N-1. It means all players have to act simultaneously which makes such a way of competing not adapted at all for large groups of people. The idea came the-

refore to make the computer active¹. instead of running business games in which students fight on the virtual market against their own colleagues, the role of their competitor was assigned to the electronic machine. In other words, the computer replaced one (or more) of competing teams and the game: live person<>live person became: live person<>machine. Achieving this was possible due to the development of techniques of the artificial intelligence (and also to a tremendous enlargement of microprocessors speed).

Picture 1. For a more detailed description of such solutions see the book: M. Muszynski, "Interactive business simulations: e-learning and more", Create Space, USA 2011.



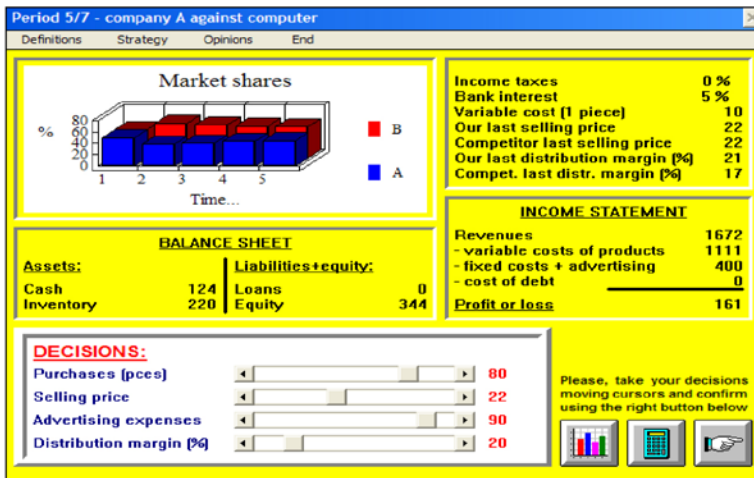
Source: Own's materials.

This way the competition can be run by all players independently, on their own computers, at any time and everywhere. Every potential student considering the possibility to sign up for Institut Français de Gestion was then allowed to use a dedicated electronic simulator on his or her own computer, to obtain a measurable result of his or her work (usually the profit of his or her virtual company), and to transfer it to the institute. Of course a system of checking whether this result has been really reached (or not) was necessary and we associate with it an encrypted code (delivered by computer) which had to be sent also to us by the player. There were thus three stages of the competition:

- Downloading the computer simulator from Institut Français de Gestion website,
- Running it individually on player's own computer – as many times as desired,
- Sending back reached results to school – with the corresponding encrypted code.

¹ Detailed descriptions of these solutions have been published in: M. Muszynski, „Interactive business simulations: e-learning and more”, Create Space, USA 2011.

Picture 2. Electronic simulator working on WINDOWS operating system.



Source: Own's materials.

The results of all players came to our institution in e-mail form with:

- Player's name, e-mail address and his or her other personal data,
- The reached results itself (as: € 25300, code BG5TR87C).

Finding the winner (or winners) was easy: we had simply to compare the numeric result with its decrypted code and doing so was necessary only for a few highest results received (not for of all players, since other had no chance to win). Winners were receiving educational grants, whereas all others were well convinced about a definitely practice oriented Institut Français de Gestion academic offer and (what is more) realized with sophisticated and modern educational tools.

The advantages of competitions with electronic simulators used as marketing tool for academic institution are obvious:

- They are unique (and different comparing to any other ad system used before);
- They are related to the MBA academic program - since the competitions consist of managing a (virtual) business;
- They are able to build personal contacts of potential students with their future school;
- They are based on new technologies.

Competitions with electronic simulators were being organized during seven years and they were attended each time by about thousand participants. Running electronic simulators was performed on their personal computers in that time. However now a new medium – introduced recently - starts to be also available and it consists of tablets and mobile phones with ANDROID operating system. These devices run the applications similar to those which were used earlier on WINDOWS based computers, however with a much better marketing efficiency, since tablets and mobile phones are broadly applied by the

young people being potential candidates for academic institutions. And the electronic simulators do not have to be limited to business managements only but may be easily applied also in sciences, psychology and other fields of education.

Picture 3. Electronic simulator working on mobile phone (ANDROID operating system).



Source: Own's materials.

The last word about the efficiency of such marketing tools. Although all (seven) our competitions were dedicated to postgraduate students, with the new technique based on mobile phones and tablets the conversion rate (i.e. the ratio between enrolled students and competition players) of young (18 – 19 years old) people could be reasonably expected as higher than 20 %. That means the total number of students acquired thanks to the competitions with electronic simulators will depend mainly on the type of media used for advertizing them.

Table 1. A non exclusive list of studies where competitions with electronic simulators are possible.

Business	Pedagogy
Economy	Polytechnic sciences
Law	Psychology
Medicine	Tourism & hospitality

Source: Own's materials.

Bibliography

1. Muszynski M., „Interactive business simulations: e-learning and more”, Create Space, USA 2011.