

We Launched With an Online Vendor, But Are We Married Forever?

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Learning Objectives

Identification
of partnership
motivating
assumptions
and their
corresponding
realities

Conflict
between for-
profit
motivation and
non-profit
institutional
identity

Methodology
for increasing
institutional
capacity of
program
management

University Snapshot - Villanova

- **Institution Type:** Private, Augustinian - founded 1842
- **Student Population:** ~11,000 students
- **Location:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania suburbs
- **Classification:** National R3 Doctoral University
- **MBA Enrollment:** 800+ students across four programs
 - EMBA
 - Cohort MBA
 - PMBA
 - *OMBA: 220 students*

Assumption #1

A vendor will provide initial infrastructure for successful launch



Reality #1

This Proved True!

Had we tried to do this entirely on our own, an official launch would have been significantly delayed – and that is only IF the Business School and the University as a whole suddenly developed an appetite for ramped up staffing and front-end investment.

Result #1

Learned Willingness for Internal Hiring & Investment

Leadership at both the College and University level now agree that internal investment – personnel and budget – is in the best interest of the program

Assumption #2

A vendor will provide marketing expertise and geographical reach that expands the geographic diversity of the Online student body



Reality #2

Mixed Results

We continue to be an institution that draws students based upon strong regional brand strength/awareness.

62%

2018 enrollees came from PA, NJ, NY, & DE

13%

'Secondary Markets' in VA, D.C., & CT

Result #2

Creation & Development of Internal Strategic Plan

Structural support from the University prompted the drafting and development of a true strategic plan. Expansion of internal marketing bandwidth was identified as critical.

Assumption #3

Vendor Operating Practices can be molded to align with the priorities of their university partner



Reality #3

This Proved Challenging

Think of it as the difference between
a corporation and a family business

Marketing Mistakes

*Use of AI messaging tools
that simulate a person-to-
person interaction*



*Recruitment techniques
that prioritize volume
over substance*

Lack of knowledge about
our other programs



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Result #3

Recruitment Should Live 'In-House'

Challenge becomes managing a parallel
pipeline without insight into recruitment
approach.

Chronic and potentially brand-damaging errors
made this unavoidable.



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Assumption #4

The existence of our partnership across operational lines could be hidden from students



Reality #4

This Proved False and Problematic

We made an assumption that our front-facing vendor staff could provide services as “Villanova employees,” thereby giving the appearance of continuity and synergy across all operational platforms.

- Our faculty often forget our efforts to identify as “one” and will openly refer students to seek support from the vendor by name, thereby causing confusion.
- Students and prospects occasionally drop by our office asking to speak to their advisor in person
- Staff turnover with our vendor has been a serious problem. For staff directly working with our students, this presents an incredible challenge.

Result #4

Reevaluate the Need for Secrecy

Internal discussions and market analysis of best practices for disclosing vendor partnerships

Assumption #5

Vendor expertise in all cross-functional areas would limit the need for internal oversight



Reality #5

This Proved 'Mostly' False

With the exception of instructional design – which has been very good - we spend more time than we anticipated coaching, supporting, and in some cases, taking the blame on behalf of those representing us.

Result #5 - Reality Check

Can we do everything?

Maybe

Should we do everything?

No

Can we at least adopt greater internal control?

Absolutely

QUESTIONS? War Stories? Best Practices?



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