

UNH Marketing Students Launch a General Motors Marketing Campaign

By Janet Lathrop
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DURHAM, N.H. -- With a carefully researched marketing strategy and event they designed for General Motors, a group of University of New Hampshire students in the Whittemore School of Business and Economics is hoping it will score a sales success and vault into contention as one of the top three college marketing teams in the country.

Emily St. Pierre, a senior in business administration and English, is team coordinator for 13 classmates enrolled in the General Motors Marketing Project, a university-corporate partnership designed to give students real-life sales promotion experience and the skills to think like dynamic marketing managers.

Their self-imposed task this semester is to create a highly visible, exciting event to introduce GM's new mini-SUV, the Aztek, to a college audience. The students chose to sponsor Block Party 2000 at a busy campus crossroad on Nov. 15, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Live music and free food were included strictly by the numbers -- they're among the top crowd stoppers among college-age browsers, according to St. Pierre. In addition to its education value, the project serves as a fund-raiser for the Manchester chapter of the Make-A-Wish Foundation, an organization that helps young people with life-threatening illnesses to fulfill dreams.

St. Pierre and her classmates have placed collection cans at area businesses for this fund, and will hold a silent auction, bake sale and donation with instant prizes at the Block Party to benefit this charity. Their budget is \$2,500 to cover the entire campaign; they quickly learned the need for "added value" -- how to multiply promotional dollars with donated food, entertainment, facilities, free ads, prizes and publicity.

"The whole project has been up to us," says St. Pierre. "We're making the decisions, and I guess we'll make the mistakes if that's what's going to happen."

But after the success of their presentation earlier this month, it appears the young marketers haven't taken any false steps yet. Speaking to GM executives, Whittemore School Dean Steve Bolander, Marketing Department Chair Jonathan Gutman and representatives of EdVenture Partners -- the matching agency between colleges and corporations -- they made an outstanding impression, according to their advisor, George Miaoulis, professor of marketing. Organizers told him afterward that the group is "one of the best teams they've seen in years," he says. "The students did an excellent job."

By participating in the GM Marketing Project, St. Pierre and her teammates are automatically entered in a national competition sponsored by EdVentures. They'll be judged on such criteria as quality and effectiveness of market research, the marketing proposal, client presentations, dealership involvement, advertising, public relations, post-event research, the budget's bottom line, group process and something called "the Wow factor." Intern groups that take the program to a new level of innovation and professionalism will receive special recognition, according to organizers.

This is the first time that four-year colleges in the Northeast have been able to participate in the GM program, said St. Pierre. She feels the UNH marketing crew has an excellent chance to place high, since their "added value" numbers are now above what's considered excellent -- the \$10,000 mark. A successful Block Party would give them "a real shot" at winning, she added.

The experiential learning course, introduced last year by Gutman, literally "jump starts" students a year ahead of other graduating seniors, says Miaoulis. He taught a similar class for several years at Colby College before re-joining the UNH faculty last year.

"Let's just start by saying that General Motors is the world's biggest corporation, so the students have a chance to interact eight times during the semester with the world's largest corporation," Miaoulis notes. "They will give three major presentations throughout the semester -- two to the client, one to me. They have to manage a budget, coordinate events and interact with the university and resources here, and manage problems they've had no experience with. They have to work in functional, interrelated teams that get their work done thoroughly, correctly, and on time. It's simply invaluable. Typically students going through this type of program are a year ahead of other students when they

graduate," he adds. It is the equivalent of their first year in an agency, but in a supportive learning environment.

"Were really hoping to have a super Block Party" the professor adds. "It's truly exciting."

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