E-Business for Entrepreneurs: A Turnkey Experiential Based Course for Teaching Faculty

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This workshop is targeted at faculty teaching entrepreneurship courses who desire a hands-on experiential approach. Specific entrepreneurship courses that this method would apply to include, but are not limited to, introduction to entrepreneurship, opportunity analysis, and business model courses. The course materials are designed for non-technical instructors and students, but can be customized for those with significant tech skills. Each part of the e-Business model is covered individually and as an integrated part of the e-Business. Key e-Business processes are implemented and evaluated. Students come away from the course understanding how to run the online portion of a business.

INTRODUCTION

This workshop is designed primarily for instructors teaching entrepreneurship courses, but it could also be useful for administrators of entrepreneurship programs and administrators running incubators and accelerators. The course materials are designed for instructors and students without a technical background, but the materials can easily be tailored for those with advanced technical skills. The course materials are designed to be used as the bulk of an instructor led course, or they can be used as independent study materials for students as a supplemental resource. Students begin the course with ideation exercises to develop a business idea. Then students are walked through developing a business model using the lean canvas method. Further refinement of the business model and opportunity analysis are accomplished through engaging with customers and creating a minimum viable product. Finally, students are taken through the processes of developing a low fidelity web presence. After completing the course students obtain a variety of transferable knowledge and skills.

The follow are examples of learning outcomes for the course:
- Crafting a Business Model using the Lean Canvas approach
- Developing a unique value proposition using the Lean Canvas
- Developing a minimum viable product for testing key assumptions/value proposition by interviewing potential customers
- Testing multiple business ideas and scaling those that work

- Creating a professional website with an effecting landing page as well as marketing and sales funnels
- Developing a step-by-step social media marketing plan to work along with the website
- Utilizing search engine optimization and measuring results using analytics tools
- Planning and implementing a pre-selling campaign and/or a full product launch

Samples of lessons and exercises will be provided for participants (e.g. PPTs) and a discussion of student and instructor online support forums will be covered. Additionally, a faculty member who has adopted these course materials in whole for the bulk of a course will share their experience.

E-BUSINESS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

The format of this course may be very different than what students are used to. However, we believe that they will find it very educational. This course uses an experiential method. Instead of merely taking exams, students will engage in "hands on" assignments (yes there will still be some quizzes and a final exam). Students do not need to have expert computer/tech skills to get an online business up and running (although there is some built in flexibility if, for example, a student is an expert in html). Students will go through the process of creating an actual business in this course. Even if students do not ultimately implement the business idea, they will find many of the topics in this course applicable to their careers (in business or non-profit).

In addition to this being an experiential course, it is also what is referred to as a flipped classroom. A traditional classroom is one where the instructor is literally the professor: spewing information to the students most likely in the form of lectures. In this course instructors will primarily serve in non-traditional roles like facilitator and coach. There is also not a traditional textbook. Most of the materials have been developed by Professor David Rahn from California State University Chico. He has an extensive technical background (e.g. he used to work in Silicon Valley), and has put together materials that make it very easy to get a business up and running on the internet. In other words, students won't need extensive tech skills (e.g. like a Stanford trained computer programmer) and can focus more on being creative (i.e. being an entrepreneur and implementing your ideas).

During the course students will both advance their own projects and act as a sounding board for the projects of fellow students. The students in this course are a team! The course begins by having students put their business idea into a business model canvas for ease of discussion and evaluation. This effort leads to a clarification of the proposed value proposition and customer segments. Following this a web host and domain name are chosen, after which a website with product or product prototype and focused marketing content is developed. Actual and potential customers are then identified and the proposed value proposition is evaluated and refined. Evaluating and refining the value proposition is accomplished through the customer development process, where customers interact with the entrepreneur through interviews and surveys, and product or product prototype if available.

At a point in the customer development process it becomes clear whether the proposed value proposition appears viable and is likely to meet the entrepreneur's expectations for the business. This helps the entrepreneur decide if the business should move ahead as envisioned, or whether the business concept needs to pivot to address a market that has more clearly emerged, and which may have different requirements. Following this the cycle is repeated with refinements to the evolving business model as needed. During the course of the semester we hope to complete as many iterations of this cycle as possible. Note that these are suggested steps and the order in which these are accomplished may vary across student projects depending on the needs of each project and the stage at which the project is in currently.

In addition to the business development work, students are expected to present a final project. The final project will capture the lessons learned as students journey through the course, and will be presented in contest pitch mode. The presentation will include a range of information beginning with the feedback students receive on the initial proposed business model, and should include the impact of the customer development process, a description of customer interactions occurring via the website and marketing

campaigns, and finally an assessment of viability and future prospects. Successful completion of this course should produce significant insight into a student's original business idea, likely changing it in many ways, and upon reflection students should be able to identify a significant number of important lessons learned. Upon completion, students have the skills to rapidly create, test and launch new businesses as desired.

DISCUSSION

There has been a trend towards competency based entrepreneurship education (cf. Morris & Kaplan, 2014). A focus on competencies has implications for how entrepreneurship courses are taught and assessed (Morris & Kaplan, 2014). In the course method outlined in this workshop, students will learn specific and transferable competencies (see learning outcomes listed above). Additionally, this method supports the process perspective of entrepreneurship (McMullen & Shephard, 2006). Students in the course potentially move through all of the steps: opportunity recognition, formation of a business concept, identification and acquisition of resources, launching the venture, making adjustments (e.g. pivoting), and exiting. However, it is our hope that students will not chose to exit the ventures started in the course.

Moreover, the addition of the concept of business models into entrepreneurship curriculum has become popular. The use of business models can be an excellent pedagogical tool, yet there have been a variety of definitions and perspectives regarding the concept (Morris & Schindehutte, 2014). In the course materials outlined above, we introduce students to the concept of a business model using the lean canvas perspective. The lean canvas model used does have the six core components (factors related to the offering, market, internal capabilities, competition, economic, and growth/investor) required for teaching a business model as outlined by Morris & Schindehutte (2014). Students are required to refine or develop their business models over the span of the course through various interactions with potential customers.

WORKSHOP AGENDA/TIMELINE

The first part of the workshop will include an introduction of both of the speakers and an icebreaker activity to build rapport with the audience. The next part of the workshop will be a presentation of the course E-business for Entrepreneurs and will include examples of course materials. These examples will include three experiential exercises: lists, slicing the pie, and the lean canvas template. The next part of the workshop will be a presentation, or 'testimonial', from a faculty member who uses the course materials. This will be followed by time for questions and answers.

REFERENCES

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