



MKT-560: Marketing Strategy Spring 2025

Sections 16541R & 16552D meet Mon & Weds: 2:00pm – 3:20pm, JKP 104
Sections 16543R & 16553D meet Weds: 6:30pm – 9:30pm, JKP 112

Instructor: Dr. Ike Silver
Office: HOH 321
Office Hours: By appointment
Email: *Ike.Silver@Marshall.USC.edu*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goal of this Marketing Strategy course is simple: To help you build great businesses by developing marketing plans that enhance customer advantage and drive growth. Our goal will be to place the tools of marketing you've encountered in other introductory marketing courses into a broader strategic context to help you see how marketing can serve management goals. For example, we will consider how marketing decisions are complicated by competitive dynamics, market conditions, limited resources, and short-term/long-term tradeoffs. I hope you will recognize familiar concepts and learn to approach them in new ways.

The course is built around five core themes:

Theme 1: Fundamentals.

This section covers marketing strategy and consumer psych tentpoles, including customer advantage, differentiation, positioning, and brand perception. It also covers the fundamentals of brand strategy, planning, and diagnosis through the lens of MarkStrat – an immersive marketing simulation you will complete in small teams over the course of the semester.

Theme 2: Growing Established Businesses

This section focuses on growing existing businesses via marketing. Why is *growth* (vs. the status quo) so important? What are the different ways firms can build profits on existing products and services? This section looks at margin enhancement strategies, core business growth strategies, and brand extension strategies.

Theme 3: Launching New Businesses

In this section, the focus is on new business creation. We look at the challenge of analyzing open markets and deciding how to enter, and we explore strategic options for turning innovative ideas into successful ventures.

Theme 4: Defensive Strategy.

In this module, we look at how companies can respond to competitive attacks. We review why defense is critical (though seldom talked about), how to evaluate competitive threats, and ways to create strong defense plans.

Theme 5: Brand Portfolio Strategy.

Building a strong brand portfolio which delivers value for multiple segments across different consumer needs is how many businesses stay relevant through time. This section looks at why portfolios matter, common challenges, and keys to success.

To explore these themes, the class will use a combination of lectures, cases, guest speakers, readings, and, critically, a semester-long, immersive marketing simulation, MarkStrat.

Drawing on my own research expertise, I will also thread these themes with an ongoing discussion about the strategic and social impact implications of purpose-driven marketing strategy. Although many firms have begun to incorporate moral or political causes into their marketing objectives, the implications of doing so are complex, and I look forward to discussing key issues in this space with you.

Marketing Strategy is a challenging course. In particular, the simulation exercise requires a nontrivial time commitment and directly influences your grade. However, the class is a valuable learning experience; the material will help you analyze and understand businesses, develop and gain support for marketing plans, and ultimately deliver strong results.

The course will certainly be valuable for people who are going into marketing. It is also useful for people who are going into consulting, management, finance, strategy, operations, and other functions. The course takes a broad view; every function is involved in building a strong business, and each intersects with marketing.

Naturally, I also think the course is fun, but I am admittedly biased.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course,

1. Students will be able to identify common strategic marketing challenges that businesses face across industries in both B2B and B2C settings, and they will be able to articulate the key high-level issues a marketing manager should keep in mind when dealing with common marketing issues. Said differently, students will be able to look at a specific business to quickly assess what species of marketing problem it is facing and supply a strategic framework for working through how to resolve it.
2. Students will also be able to generate a list of appropriate marketing initiatives that a business could deploy to resolve strategic marketing challenges and clearly explain why a given tool

(e.g., cutting prices, rebranding, launching a new product, running more ads, etc.) would or would not be appropriate for a given situation with reference to both historical precedent and sound strategic logic.

3. Students will be able to speak cogently about marketing issues, including both asking and answering questions live about product, price, place, and promotion issues as well as writing memos about specific business problems.
4. Students will be able to read and interpret basic financial statements to provide a high-level picture of how a business is doing and identify marketing-relevant issues that can be gleaned from bottom-line performance.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts: There is no required textbook for this course. However, you will need to purchase the Marketing 560 Case Packet. This is available through the USC bookstore in a physical or digital format. I highly recommend downloading the cases digitally and printing them, as I will ask that you bring printed copies of the case to class to aid in discussion and note taking.

Required Software: You will need to purchase a MarkStrat license to participate in the Markstrat simulation. Details to come on how to do this.

Optional: There are additional readings and materials that will be posted on BrightSpace. These are optional unless I specify otherwise in class.

Note also that Marshall has site licenses for a variety of softwares that students can access free of charge. A list of available software is located [here](#). You are responsible for ensuring that you have the necessary computer equipment and reliable internet access. You are invited to explore what lab or loaner options exist. Contact the Marshall HelpDesk (213-740-3000 or HelpDesk@marshall.usc.edu) if you need assistance.

If you have any questions about using Brightspace, please contact the Marshall HelpDesk at 213-740-3000 (option 2) or HelpDesk@marshall.usc.edu." Alternatively, (213) 740-5555 will get you the USC ITS Help Desk.

GRADING

The breakdown of grading points is as follows:

<u>Assignments</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>% of Overall Grade</u>
Class Participation	20	20%
MarkStrat Team Performance	25	25%
Exam I	20	20%
Exam II	20	20%
MarkStrat Reflection Paper	15	15%
TOTAL	100	100%

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class participation in this course is essential. Simply put, you will not benefit from taking this course if you do not prepare, attend, and join the discussion. And, selfishly, I will not have nearly as much fun teaching you if you leave me droning on at the front of the room. So, I think you should come and participate for the good of everyone.

More formally, class participation will be a considerable portion of your final grade (20%).

Effective class participation constitutes the following:

1. *Attend class.* I expect you to attend and will track attendance. However, I understand that things come up. **You can miss three classes without penalty to your participation grade.** If you expect to miss more than three classes, please come talk to me. I am unlikely to offer ways to “make up” missed points, but I want to be on the same page with you about how to stay on top of course material. Please note that I do not delineate between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. You do not need to notify me if you are absent, but you are free to do so if you wish.
2. *Join the discussion.* The style of this class will be highly interactive. That means I expect you to ask questions, share reflections, raise counterexamples, respond to your peers, and generally speak up. I know this is not easy for everyone, so I will help you by (1) giving you time to discuss key issues with peers and (2) warm calling on a rotating basis during class time. Please note that you will not be penalized for providing “incorrect” answers in class: I simply expect you to be a part of the conversation.
3. *Read the cases.* The days on which we discuss cases will be especially focused on group discussion. To prepare for these discussions, you need to read the case beforehand (which I will remind you to do as we go). Cases hinge critically on students having read in advance, so to get a sense of whether students have read the cases, we will typically start with some basic ‘reading check’ questions about the case content. I plan for these checks to be informal, but if I get the sense that students are not reading the cases ahead of time, I reserve the right to institute more formal “case quizzes.”

HOMEWORK

In addition to reading the cases and coming prepared for class discussions, your primary homework in this course will be competing in the MarkStrat simulation (see below). **Specifically, you and your teammates will be required to submit seven weekly “decisions”** about how to manage a simulated suite of products in a competitive market, competing against your classmates. These decisions will include what products to develop and bring to market, how to advertise them, where to sell them, and what market research to procure for future periods. Decisions will typically be due on Tuesdays and we will discuss the results of them—which impact your grade—weekly in class on Wednesdays. As you will see, the simulation cannot accept late decisions by design. In addition to these seven decisions, **you will be asked to complete a short (~5ish) paper assignment as a team to demonstrate your mastery of the simulation** at the end of the semester.

MARKSTRAT (GROUP WORK)

As indicated, the central assignment in this class is a team-based simulation, MarkStrat. You will be assigned by me to teams of 4-5 students and you will need to find time to work together (either

virtually or in person) over the course of the semester. Teams will submit decisions in MarkStrat and work together on a final paper assignment. How you manage your team is entirely up to you, though I expect each member to purchase a MarkStrat license and participate actively in the simulation and in team work products. I will check on the backend to see who is accessing the simulation, and I will ask you to complete a peer evaluation form at the end of the semester. If you run into any issues with your team's ability to meet and work effectively, please notify me promptly.

EXAMS

There will be two exams. The first will be an in-class exam on **Wednesday, March 12**. The second will be an in-class exam on **Wednesday, April 23**. Both will be straightforward, multiple-choice tests. More details will be given on these as they approach.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK

Feedback on this course is important to me. The student course evaluations you will provide at the end of the semester are invaluable. However, this course is continuously improved based on feedback from students and instructor observations. If you have any specific suggestions that might improve the course, please contact me.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, the USC Emergency Information web site (<https://www.usc.edu/emergency/>) will provide safety and other information, including electronic means by which instructors will conduct class using a combination of USC's Brightspace learning management system, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

CLASS RECORDINGS

Unless faculty request that their courses are not to be recorded using Panopto, all Marshall courses are recorded. Consequently, this course is automatically recorded. These recordings are available on a request only basis. If you would like to see a recording of one of our sessions (e.g., because you are absent), please reach out to me.

Pursuant to the *USC Student Handbook* (<https://policy.usc.edu/studenthandbook/>, pages 13 and 27), students may not record a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class. This means you are not allowed to take your own recordings. In addition, students may not distribute or use notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property based on USC classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than personal or class-related group study by students registered for the class. This restriction on unauthorized use applies to all information that is distributed or displayed for use in relationship to the class. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. Violation of this policy may subject an individual or entity to university discipline and/or legal proceedings.

USE OF AI GENERATORS

AI tools are increasingly ubiquitous in our daily lives, at the university, and in the workplace. Consequently, I am ok with you using AI for most uses in my class. However, I fear you will find AI relatively unhelpful in my course, at least for graded assignments. For the MarkStrat simulation, the

kind of general guidance you can get from AI will not necessarily help your team win, and for in-class exams you will not have access to AI. Naturally, AI cannot help with your participation grade. All of this said, you should definitely get used to using AI tools. Feel free to discuss course content with it, and let me know if you come up with any interesting applications to Marketing Strategy.

***There is one important exception: **PLEASE DO NOT USE AI TO ANALYZE THE CASES** ahead of our discussions of them. This will not improve your grade in any way, and case discussions will be substantially less interesting if you have asked AI to provide answers before we have had the time to discuss and work through the key issues in each case together.

OPEN EXPRESSION AND RESPECT FOR ALL

An important goal of the educational experience at USC Marshall is to be exposed to and discuss diverse, thought-provoking, and sometimes controversial ideas that challenge one's beliefs. In this course we will support the values articulated in the USC Marshall "[Open Expression Statement](https://www.marshall.usc.edu/open-expression-statement)" (<https://www.marshall.usc.edu/open-expression-statement>).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of Southern California is committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious violation, and it carries serious consequences.

STATEMENT ON UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the

semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate](#)- and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call
Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.