**Part 1 - What is Strategic Marketing?**

**Learning Outcomes**

1. ***Creating Value for Customers:***  Student can demonstrate an understanding of the concept of value creation.
2. ***The Role of the Customer in the Company's Strategic Planning.***  Student can assess the company's commit to serving customer needs as evidenced in a company's mission statement.
3. ***SWOT analysis***:  Student can conduct a simple SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) of a product or service offering and draw inferences from an analysis of the results.
4. ***Competitive Analysis:***  Student can conduct a simple competitive analysis based on criteria important to the customers of the product or service.

**Directions**

* Select your product or service offering from the list in the Writing Assignment Discussion Forum. This list is also in the Syllabus. The**same product/service will be used in all of the writing assignments.**
* Research your product or service offering through the Internet and UMUC’s virtual library (your references will need to be mostly academic sources. See library services if you do not know what an academic source means).  Do not limit yourself to searching solely on the product or service name.  Look up the industry it is in (Hoovers.com is a good source for this via the UMUC library) and search on that industry as well.  Look up the direct competitors.  Check industry journals and the trade press. Ask your family, friends, coworkers and others what they think about the product and each of the competitors.  You may want to visit a retailer to compare the products on the shelves or visit all of the websites.  Keep all your research as you will need it for future writing assignments.
* Prepare your assignment beginning with a title page with your name and and the name of your product or service.  Then answer each of the following four questions in order and number the beginning of your response to each question.  You do not need to repeat the question.

1. ***Creating Value for Customers.***Consider the customers you believe currently use your product or service and the definition of marketing offered in the course content.  As we begin our study of marketing, what are your preliminary thoughts as to how you think the company creates value for its customers based on the concepts in this week's readings.
2. ***Role of the Customer in the Company's Strategic Plan.***The readings indicate that the best marketing begins with the customer and that commitment to the customer begins with including the customer in the company's mission statement.  Find your company's mission statement.  Repeat it (or attach as an exhibit if it is too long) and comment on its effectiveness in demonstrating the company's commitment to having a customer focus.  Could the mission statement have more focus on the customer?  How would you recommend it be modified?  Is it supported with value statements or other evidence of a customer focus?
3. ***SWOT analysis.***  Identify at least one element of each of the SWOT categories (a strength, a weakness, an opportunity, and a threat).  Explain your choice using a citation if needed.  Then identify possible implications for each of the four elements.  *For example, if a strength is a a strong national brand name, the implication is that the company may be able to launch other related products under the positive umbrella of the same brand name.  Conversely, if a major weakness is the company is carrying a lot of debt, the implication is that the company not not be able to achieve significant growth, but may have to consider retrenchment strategies.*
4. ***Competitive Analysis.***Identify at least two major competitors or those two products that are trying to sell essentially identical products to the same type of consumer.  Then, identify at least three criteria that are important to those consumers when they are making their decision as to which of the three competing offers to buy (e.g. price, specific benefit, service, warranty, convenience, specific feature, etc.).  Make a little chart with the three criteria along the left-hand side and the competitor products (including your own product) across the top.  Rank each of the products on a scale from 1= low to 5= high on each performs on each of the three criteria.  Add down each column.   Which product ranked highest overall based on the sum of the columns.   Then, look at the highest score in each of the criteria boxes.  Which products ranked the highest on each of the three criteria? Was it the same product, was it three different products?  What do these results tell you about the competitive environment of your product category.  Which product is the leader?  Which product is the follower, challenger and nicher if those categories apply?  **Attach your chart as an exhibit.**

**Part 2 - Customer Satisfaction, Loyalty,  Management and Empowerment**

**Learning Outcomes**

1. ***Customer empowerment.***Student can identify how their chosen product or service offering uses social networks to communicate and empower customers to be part of the marketing process.
2. ***Customer satisfaction.***  Student can identify how customers communicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the chosen product or service offering.
3. ***Customer Relationship Management.***  Student can explain customer lifetime value and how a customer relationship management program can have a role in attracting and retaining most valuable customers.
4. ***Customer privacy.***  Student can identify the product or service offerings privacy policy and analyze its effectiveness in protecting their customer’s information.

**Directions**

* You may want to find a Most Valuable Customer (MVC) of the product or service if you are not one yourself, or alternatively think like an MVC.  What is the evidence of an MVC of your product or service?  It isn't just that the customer regularly buys the product or service.  It means that the customer is treated differently -- better -- than other customers.  It means that the MVC represents about 20% of the company's revenues.   These are the customers with whom the company regularly communicates, offers special deals,  and other ways as outlined in the text and as you can find with just a little bit of googling on the internet.
* You may want to calculate the lifetime value of a most valuable customer.  See the discussion of the lifetime value calculation in the week's reading, and calculate the LTV using this simple equation:  LTV = (Price - cost to produce the product) \* number of annual purchases \* number of years expected to purchase - initial acquisition costs.  For simplicity sake, you can assume your customer will have a relationship with you for ten years and you can make an educated guess as to how much the initial acquisition costs were to get him as a customer in terms of advertising or other types of promotion efforts.   If you are not an MVC yourself, make and share your assumptions about your calculation. If you are not an MVC, you might want to find someone who is and ask them why they are loyal to the product or service and what they feel the company does for them that is special that they don't do for other customers.
* You may need call or visit a store to take a look at your product or service if the website does not provide you everything you need to evaluate the company's product or service privacy policy.  Usually the privacy policy is available on the website.
* Answer the following four questions in order and number the beginning of your response to each question.
  1. ***Customer Empowerment.***How does your product or service offering empower its customers as discussed in the course readings this week?  In other word, how are customers part of the marketing for the company? Identify the feedback vehicles they may use, especially social media. Do the social media efforts seem to be creating buzz marketing? If not, what could they do to generate more ‘buzz’?
  2. ***Customer satisfaction***.  How does your product or service offering communicate ways for customers to express their dissatisfaction? If possible, outline what remedies the product or service may be taking to ensure satisfaction.
  3. ***Customer Relationship Management.***Does it appear that your product has a customer relationship management strategy?  In other words, do they treat the top tier of customers differently than other customers? If so, what is your evidence?  If not, should they have a CRM strategy?  Or, are there compelling reasons why your product or service should treat all customers the same?  Refer to course content concepts in your response.
  4. ***Customer privacy***.  Review your product or service offering's privacy policy (usually published on its website). Analyze whether you think they do enough to protect the customer’s privacy or what steps you might suggest they take to protect customer's privacy.  Refer to the privacy policies or the information on warranties and guarantees.  The company's customer support page might also be useful. Do they publish a remedy should the customer's privacy be breached?  Should they?

**General Submission Requirements**

* Prepare as a word processed document (such as Microsoft Word). Use a simple 12-point font such as Times New Roman.  Use black ink for majority of your work and only use colors if it enhances your ability to communicate your thoughts.

• Your assignment should be the equivalent of approximately **five** pages of double-spaced text, approximately 1/2 page for each of the eight questions (four in Part 1 and four in Part 2).  You may attach exhibits that will not be counted towards the page count of double-spaced text. The cover page and Bibliography page are not part of the five pages of written analysis.

• Be sure your name, writing assignment number, and the name of your product or service are on the cover page of your writing assignment.

• Include a bibliography, which includes at least four references.