Dr. Brian Brown

What attracted you to the VCU School of Business?

There are a number of factors that I found attractive about the VCU School of Business. I was excited about the opportunity to work with the marketing faculty and really appreciated their interest in my background and my business-to-business (B2B)/branding research in particular. I also wanted to be a part of the growth and momentum here. From a personal standpoint, I am actually returning home, as I grew up in Alexandria, VA and attended the University of Virginia.

How did you become interested in brand strategy, business-to-business (B2B) marketing, and product management?

I have had an interest and passion for marketing for years, certainly since my earlier career in brand management at The Coca-Cola Company. When I made the recent transition to academia, I saw an opportunity to make a real contribution in the branding area and specifically the B2B branding area. The fact is that B2B branding is relatively understudied and misunderstood compared to consumer branding. Many B2B managers still have not fully accepted the value of branding, and those that do see the value in branding often lack the resources and sophistication to optimize their brand investments.

You have published or have forthcoming articles in academic journals including the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, the International Journal of Research in Marketing, the Journal of Business Research, and Industrial Marketing Management. What are you working on now?

My research tends to focus on the nuances of B2B branding compared with consumer branding. I am generally intrigued by the distinctions between the two domains and how those distinctions influence brand strategy. More specifically, my research asks questions related to when and why brands matter more or less in B2B contexts. For example, does the level of perceived risk or the importance or complexity of a purchase influence receptivity to brand information in an organization’s purchase decision?

Currently, I am working on a project that assesses the effectiveness of social media messages in B2B contexts. While many B2B marketers are trying social media tools, many of them do not know how to take advantage of this new phenomenon. My co-authors and I are in the process of analyzing the Facebook and Twitter posts of Fortune 500 companies to gauge their social media usage, compare the usage of B2B marketers to their B2C counterparts, and determine the factors most likely to lead to the effective utilization of social media.

Ultimately, this study should offer guidance to B2B marketing managers regarding social media strategies and their successful execution.

To what do you attribute the current interest in branding? What does the public need to understand about it?

I think some of the growing interest in branding can be attributed to increased global competition and the current economy. Companies realize that they must differentiate themselves in a meaningful way in order to survive and thrive. Brand management is certainly one way to accomplish this objective, as evidenced by the success of companies that have invested in branding. What companies, and the public in general, need to recognize is that brand-building is a long-term investment and should be treated as such.

What do you want marketing students to know?

This may seem obvious, but I want to make sure that students understand what marketing is (and is not) and the value it can bring to any organization. It’s more than glossy advertising campaigns or sales; instead it has everything
to do with building value-added relationships with the “right” current and prospective customers as well as various stakeholders, including distributors and suppliers. Additionally, I would like to reinforce the need for strategic thinking skills and analytical rigor, and the necessity to understand and collaborate with various functions throughout the organization.

**How does your corporate experience inform your academic work?**

I’ve had an opportunity to work for companies including Coke and AT&T, as well as a “dotcom” company and Snapper Power Equipment. These corporate experiences have influenced many of my research ideas and projects, the most notable being my interest in branding. These experiences also are beneficial in the classroom where I frequently offer personal anecdotes that relate to relevant topics, and provide career advice and insights that might help students navigate their careers.