

Venture Analysis

Running Head: Venture Analysis

Venture Analysis: Royal Roads University OpenCourseWare

Marie-France Héту

ETEC 522 – 64C

Ventures in Learning Technology

Master of Educational Technology

External Programs and Learning Technologies

University of British Columbia, B. C.

Instructor: David Vogt

June 17, 2012

Venture Analysis: Royal Roads University – OpenCourseWare

OpenCourseWare is a relatively new learning trend that is quickly becoming popular. Since MIT began their [CourseWare initiative](#), other big companies have followed suite, such as Microsoft's '[partners in Learning](#)' who also offer various types of free courses from which millions of individuals can benefit. At first glance, such generous initiatives may appear purely altruistic, but these maneuvers also happen to be great marketing strategies for companies.

This analysis takes a look at the OpenCourseWare initiative fostered by Royal Roads University (RRU) since 2010. I will first analyze [RRU's venture pitch](#), then compare my findings with the actual [OpenCourse Ware program](#) offered by Royal Roads University. This objective, critical analysis will consider all the facets of the venture in a holistic manner. I will also include a video of my reflections, relating the relevance of my analysis to my own venture proposal and pitch for assignment no. 3.

Rationale for Venture Choice

This real-world, learning technology venture is of real interest to me, since this type of higher education OpenCourseWare, is meant to operate not only for-profit, but as a social enterprise that takes global education to heart. As an educator, I would personally like to take part in such a venture someday, as I am highly interested in promoting learning for learning sake. As a learner, I also wish to analyze the potential of this venture to evaluate if the courses offered could supplement my current and ongoing learning experience. On a more immediate note, lessons learned from this analysis will also guide the creation of my own venture pitch for assignment no. 3.

Venture Analysis

Analysis of RRU's Venture Pitch

At first glance RRU's venture pitch appears excellent; the message is well communicated by a capable speaker, diffused within the pleasing grounds of the University. RRU presents their OpenCourseWare venture as one that can both benefit the organization and at the same time serve altruistic purposes. Thus, I have divided the pitch message into these two categories, which I will then compare with RRU's actual OpenCourseWare online program.

Message Concerning Benefits to RRU

The venture pitch outlines that:

- OpenCourseWare is a marketing tool that could increase RRU's enrollment
- By taking a course, students will be able to judge the quality of academic content for themselves
- Students will encounter innovative ways of pedagogy and learning outcomes offered by RRU
- OpenCourseWare will demonstrate an institution that functions differently, thus increasing faculty recruitment and attracting experts within their rich and meaningful community
- OpenCourseWare is a way to showcase RRU's growing reputation for excellence and how they use technology to enhance and facilitate learning

Altruistic Message

Through their venture pitch, RRU promotes the idea that:

- OpenCourseWare is the type of venture that empowers people
- This type of venture will foster and support the growth of a learning society, encouraging learning for learning sake, above and beyond getting a degree

Venture Analysis

- Current university students can also benefit from this type of courseware, supplementing their learning
- Students get access to an array of free, high quality learning/teaching resources.
- RRU's OpenCourseWare has global implications, for these types of courses can be accessed around the world, thus contributing to the rise of education standards

Content

- RRU is not proposing a new product or service, for OpenCourseWare programs already exist
- Their OpenCourseWare does not compare itself to other services
- Their marketing scheme appears to be well laid out as they intend to use the OpenCourseWare venue to market the university's excellence and promote learning
- Courses will be online, so it is presumed users will be reached online
- The OpenCourseWare offered by RRU is portrayed as one supported by experienced staff that will demonstrate the university's innovation and expertise
- The pitch does not elaborate on the funding required, but the web site confirms that the program is funded
- Difficult to determine how many people actually benefit from such a program in the short term beyond quantifying the number of visitors or course participants

Venture Concept

- The venture concept is not original – other universities and companies already offer OpenCourseWare programs
- Since the courses are run in direct collaboration with RRU and its staff, the project is feasible

Venture Analysis

- RRU's OpenCourseWare is considered a marketing tool and a learning program, thus funding is allotted for this project
- In my opinion, RRU has not personalized their concept as much as they could have. Courses offered look like many other 'Moodle' courses offered by other individuals.

Marketability & Market Gap

- This venture pitch does not distinguish its own OpenCourseWare with what is already out there.
- In comparison with RRU's web site, the Microsoft and MIT OpenCourseware online programs offer complex and sophisticated web sites, with well-established learning communities.
- RRU's target market is primarily students thinking of entering university, thus the market size could be huge, but there are many other means of advertising and promoting universities out there, and I don't think RRU's OpenCourseWare program, in its present form, can capture a large chunk of the market in a highly competitive world.

Competitive Edge

- RRU OpenCourseWare, presently does not have a competitive edge. Programs such as offered by MIT and Microsoft are more sophisticated, and offer a wider variety of courses.
- Even though RRU may not have the same budget as large companies, it could have developed a niche market in link with the University's expertise and thus offer innovative courses.

Venture Analysis

Venture Plan

- This venture has been on the market for 2 years now. There is no indication of how many students have actually taken the courses, or how the program has done thus far.
- In their venture pitch, RRU has a concrete idea of what OpenCourseWare will offer, although the process itself is not outlined.

Analysis of RRU's OpenCourseware Program in Relation to RRU's Venture Pitch

RRU's venture pitch boasted an OpenCourseWare program based on altruistic principles, as well as a program that would serve as a good marketing tool to encourage enrollment and faculty recruitment, while acting as a platform to show RRU's educational excellence and innovation. There were many discrepancies between the venture pitch and the actual OpenCourseWare program, for example:

- I found that, unlike their venture pitch, the RRU OpenCourseWare program did not support a free global learning program.
- The venture pitch claims their program is also altruistic in nature, yet I found that courses were geared to attract university students or complement current university student's learning
- The venture pitch also showcases their OpenCourseWare program as one that will attract both students and professors, yet the web site is quite drab and does not reflect RRU's dynamic possibilities nor does it inspire excellence or innovation.
- The OpenCourse Ware program courses offered appear to target current or future RRU students. There are no courses offered through their program that would particularly appeal to an international audience.

Venture Analysis

- Their OpenCourseWare program website offers little in-depth information about the ideals behind the program or RRU. Information is limited to who finances the program and a general comment about course designers. The founders of the program nor the facilitators are introduced.
- Little is said on the site about encouraging learning for learning sake
- Some links are intended only for RRU students, which limits the general public's access to some information

Positive Aspects of RRU Instructional Skills Online Workshops

- Sessions seem to encourage collective learning
- Interactive activities are offered
- Content is Student-centered
- Offers synchronous (text-based) and asynchronous (Elluminate conferencing)modes of communication
- Based on constructivist principles
- Useful courses for newbies to online learning

On a personal basis I saw several courses I might consider taking, such as 'Advanced Research Methods', which is always a subject about which one can learn more. This type of course is likely to interest other participants already taking higher education courses.

Another course of interest to me is Global Communication, which explores the role of technology in relation to social, cultural and political arenas.

Reservations

I do have some reserves about the course 'Give Green Canada' – which I feel is somewhat out of place within a higher education setting format. It almost feels as a form of

Venture Analysis

advertising for funding various non-profit organizations. Generally, the courses offered under this program are presently limited in scope.

Not much is known about the team that makes up the web site, one can communicate with Mary Burgess if needed, but who are the facilitators? Why were the courses created and by whom exactly? The web site has been designed by RRU developers and is funded by B. C. Campus – but little else of the ‘raison d’être’ for launching this learning venture is available. A general learning community seems absent, although perhaps present within each course.

Conclusion

Would I invest time, energy and capital in such a venture? OpenCourseWare - yes, RRU’s OpenCourseWare - no. The altruistic idea behind OpenCourseWare in the general sense is commendable. I truly believe it is possible to share knowledge and encourage learning for learning sake. I understand that nothing is ever truly ‘free’ and that often these types of programs are also marketing tools, which is expected and fair. I believe it is possible to create OpenCourseWare, that beyond a marketing tool makes its mark as a social learning venture.

If I cannot support RRU’s OpenCourseware venture it is because RRU did not back-up their venture pitch message when they created their actual OpenCourseWare online program. RRU’s OpenCourseWare program does not promote the University’s quality of academic content. The courses themselves are basic and don’t particularly offer innovative ways of pedagogy or learning outcomes. The Moodle platform does not present or make use of new technology to facilitate learning. Little on this website demonstrates the existence of a rich and meaningful learning community, and I am not sure that in its present format it is likely to attract many students or faculty to RRU. The most disappointing aspect of RRU’s OpenCourseWare online program is that I did not feel the courses offered would empower anyone, or that this

Venture Analysis

venture could foster or support the growth of a learning community with the altruistic spirit in mind.

As a venture analyst, I would not invest funds in this venture. RRU's OpenCourseWare program did not really support a free global learning program, but rather the program and courses were primarily geared in trying to attract new students, or provide supplementary learning for present RRU students. As an educator, I believe RRU still has some work to do to make their OpenCourseWare a social enterprise that takes global education to heart. I would not invest time as faculty within this program in its present form, but would likely be pleased to work at improving the website if RRU wished to adapt and refocus. As a learner, I would be willing to invest some time in trying out some courses to supplement my learning, but I have yet to test their quality.

Sources

An intrapreneurial venture to take Royal Roads University into open education. Video on YouTube, shared on ETEC 522, as part of a MET, UBC course. Retrieved May 30, 2012.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1avzWv3_JDw&feature=player_embedded

Asay.M, (2009). MIT OpenCourseWare: Teaching the World for Free. Retrieved June 5, 2012.

http://news.cnet.com/8301-13505_3-10199836-16.html

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Website. Retrieve June 6, 2012.

<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>

Microsoft in Education Website: Microsoft in Partners Learning. Retrieved June 5, 2012.

<http://www.microsoft.com/education/ww/partners-in-learning/Pages/index.aspx>

RRU Open Education Resources. Royal Roads University. Retrieved June 2, 2012.

<http://oer.royalroads.ca/moodle/>