

Partnering with an Industry Giant to Fill Skills Gaps and Support Job Readiness

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Fostering and maintaining strong partnerships with local employers is critical to offering innovative curricula that supports job-readiness and fills skills gaps.

In December 2018, Miami Dade College (MDC) launched a certificate program in partnership with Facebook to help train students, small business owners, entrepreneurs and others in digital marketing. This partnership is part of a growing trend where increasing numbers of postsecondary institutions are partnering with industry leaders to create and co-brand programming designed to support job-readiness and skill development in emerging fields. In this interview, Lenore Rodicio discusses the collaborating with industry to create relevant programming and reflects on the benefits of MDC's partnership with Facebook.

The EvoLLLution (Evo): What challenges do educational leaders face when trying to ensure programming and curricula is up-to-date and relevant to labor market needs?

Lenore Rodicio (LR):With the rapid pace of the changes in technology and their significant impacts on business and the world, forecasting the changing needs of industry is a continuous challenge. Companies themselves struggle with this challenge, making the assessment of human capital needs a strategic priority in human resource departments.

Evo: How can forging partnerships with employers help to minimize these roadblocks?

LR: A continuous dialog with human resource leaders in industry as well as subject matter experts is an essential component. Key to a successful partnership, and as a way to minimize roadblocks, is continuous communication of the various needs from industry and also from academia. Industry and academia, at times, move at different speeds; therefore, it is necessary that needs, timelines and expectations are clarified in order to obtain results. It is also paramount the industry experts advise on their technology needs so that institutions can train students using the same equipment and processes.

This makes for job-ready and more productive employees. Forging these partnerships should also be a two-way street. It cannot fall on just the institutions. Major employers often mention a lack of talent in the areas in which they operate. But if that talent is grown and groomed, the costs of operating businesses are reduced and so are the roadblocks. It's a win-win for both companies and colleges. Institutions must also be nimble and flexible to change course and modify programs to fit exactly what industries need. Pipeline programs and apprenticeships are part of the new norm. Strong alliances between colleges and businesses and a unified voice also make for a more compelling argument before government and their regulatory agencies to clear unnecessary or outdated bureaucracy and red tape.

Evo: How did the partnership between MDC and Facebook on the expansion to the Digital Marketing Management certificate come about?

LR: MDC has always been at the forefront of innovation in academic programs. We have always focused on market needs and created programs to address these needs. For example, MDC's Digital Marketing Certificate program, the first of its kind in Florida, received approval in the summer of 2018 and the college has since started offering courses to students. Facebook also recognized the gap in the Social Media market and has embarked on creating a curriculum that tailors to those needs.

By partnering with Facebook, MDC will embed many of the learning outcomes from the Facebook certificate into our existing curriculum and create new classes to expand MDC's certificate. The idea is to provide students with a strong foundation and knowledge in the digital marketing space. These future employees will be able to enter the workforce job ready. Once again, this is a win-win for colleges, students and employers.

In the case of Facebook, both organizations wanted to collaborate, making for a smooth union. MDC has embarked on similar partnerships with hundreds of leading companies from Disney to Sony and Pan Am to Tesla, Amazon, Nickelodeon to Univision, NextEra Energy, Publix, PortMiami and many, many more. We will continue forging and fostering such partnerships moving forward.

Evo: How will the partnership with Facebook set MDC's offering apart in what is a

very competitive market?

LR: By enrolling in MDC's Associate of Science in Marketing/Digital Marketing Program, students will obtain a college credit-bearing certificate that is stackable into a two-year associate of science degree in marketing.

Partnering with Facebook will enhance the offering of the programs and provide students with class-based and simulation-based abilities that expose them to the relevant skills needed today in the digital marketing and social media world. Their job prospects are unlimited. And, as mentioned, they can step into important roles within companies with little or no learning curve.

Our partnerships with Facebook and other leading companies have also served as a recruitment tool, letting current and prospective students know that attending MDC will lead to employment. These partnerships also provide a safety net for employers, who now have a reliable and efficient employee pool they can tap into when in need of workers. That is always a deal maker or breaker in the competitive higher education space. Colleges and universities cannot operate in a bubble. Innovation and strategic partnerships must be the guiding principles. Only then can institutions of higher education respond to the needs of the 21st-century global knowledge economy and offer students the skillsets they need to succeed in this modern age of innovation and ingenuity.

Evo: How will students benefit from the alignment of the certificate program with a market leader like Facebook?

LR: The strength of the Facebook brand as well as the company's strong and competitive presence in social media complement the Miami Dade College brand, providing enhanced opportunities for our students to acquire skills demanded by industry. Students will definitively benefit from increased industry partnerships resulting in additional access to networks and collaborative projects. Digital literacy skills are becoming increasingly important and students earning such a credential will have expanded opportunities for internships, job training and job placement.

For Miami-Dade County, the certificate program enhances opportunities for employers to recruit, train, and retain employees locally, providing graduates with secure employment and invaluable financial security while supporting businesses in the community with efficient and sustainable models.

For students, it is another powerful tool in their personal marketability and employment toolkit. It can definitely be a game changer. As mentioned, the community and industry also benefit. Greater Miami has faced both talent flight and the need to bring in talent from other regions. This initiative and others at the college obviate this, growing and grooming a local pool of talented changemakers who will also be primed to be lifetime learners and adapt to changing industry needs and the light-speed of changes in technology.

