Southern New Hampshire University

MBA 560 Final Project Guidelines and Rubric

Overview

More and more firms and organizations have realized that the brand name associated with their products or services is one of the most important assets that they own. A brand embodies a company's identity and the quality, ideals, ethics, and customer commitment for which it stands. It is the heart and soul of the decisions on which products are brought to market and how. It also enables management to strategically and effectively steer the destiny of a product or company while building value.

For this summative assessment, you will imagine you are an executive in charge of branding and strategic positioning initiatives at the company you have been working on throughout this course. You will build a comprehensive business plan for the launch of a new product or service idea at the company. Your plan will evaluate current branding strategies, describe the target market and its unique features, assess existing organizational strengths, weaknesses, and core competencies with respect to the new idea, determine pricing strategies, and establish continuous improvement processes that span the life cycle of the product or service being offered, as well as other key variables outlined in the rubric below. You will also consider how consumer trends and ethical business practices might impact your plan.

The business plan should be the next step in developing the intrapreneurial or entrepreneurial idea that you developed in MBA-515 for a new product, service, or process. Note that you will continue to build on this business plan throughout your 600-level MBA coursework, culminating in the capstone in which you will tie things together and either begin to implement your plan (if feasible), or create a plan for implementing it (if implementation is not feasible).

The project is divided into **three milestones**, which will be submitted at various points throughout the course to scaffold learning and ensure quality final submissions. These milestones will be submitted in **Modules Three, Five, and Seven.** The final product will be submitted in **Module Nine.**

In this assignment, you will demonstrate your mastery of the following course outcomes:

- Evaluate branding strategies by applying appropriate marketing and management analysis
- Defend target market choices by analyzing the unique characteristics of potential markets that impact business success
- Justify pricing decisions based on relevant target market analysis, business goals, and market conditions
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of organizations in strategically planning new business activities
- Assess consumer trends and business ethics for determining their potential impact on branding image and business success in a global environment
- Design business-wide continuous improvement processes for regularly reviewing branding and business activities and implementing needed changes

Prompt

Using your intrapreneurial or entrepreneurial business idea from the previous MBA-515 Business Environment, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship course, or a new idea, imagine you are an executive at the relevant company. You have decided to take this idea to the next level by producing a comprehensive business plan to present to senior management and potential investors in order to convince them to back the project. Your plan should focus on key elements of marketing and strategy, such as branding, customer base, existing resources and capabilities, pricing, and other factors that could affect your project's success. Your business plan should highlight the merits of the project based on a detailed internal analysis, showing how the idea fits with the company's mission and vision. Remember that a well-constructed business plan provides concise, accurate information that allows busy executives or investors to quickly grasp the essentials of your idea, the key need or want it addresses, and how you will meet that need or want.

Specifically, the following **critical elements** must be addressed:

I. **Executive summary**. Using the tenets provided in Module Nine Reading and Resources, begin your paper with an executive summary.

II. **Context**. This section should provide leadership and potential investors with background information on the company's current brand and how your new product or service fits with that brand. Be sure to do the following:
   A. Describe the key **defining features** of the company's brand and how these features drive business decisions. For example, how are these factors an extension of the company's mission, vision, and values? What are the non-negotiables for a product or service to carry the company name? What is the company known for/as/about?
   B. Assess how the new idea **fits** with the company's existing brand and how that impacts your business plan. Support your response with relevant research and analysis. For example, will the product or service be part of a new brand or an existing brand? How will that affect the way you market the product both within the company and to consumers?
   C. Evaluate the **effectiveness** of the company's existing branding efforts (or branding efforts for similar products or services if yours is a new company). What does the evaluation suggest for the new product or service? Support your response with relevant analysis.

III. **Need**. Use this section to define your target market and explain how your product or service fills a critical need or want for that market.
   A. Define your **target market** and its unique characteristics. Be sure to analyze the following: **Basic demographics.** What are the key demographic features of the individuals or businesses who are most likely to purchase your product or service? Support your response with relevant market research. For example, how might age, purchasing power, decision-making authority, or other factors affect your product or service's appeal to potential customers?
   B. Analyze what **other** behavioral or psychographic characteristics of your target market might affect their purchasing decisions. Support your response with relevant research.
   C. Analyze how your new product or service meets a specific **want or need** of the target market that you identified. In other words, what principal benefits or key features would your target market find appealing? Support your response with relevant market research.

    D. Based on your analysis above, argue **why** this target market is the best strategic choice for the success of your product or service.

IV. **Strengths and weaknesses.** In this section, you should assess the ramifications of your new business idea on branding, operations, and planning within the organization, based on internal analysis.

    A. Assess the company's tangible and intangible **strengths** in providing the new product or service, along with any **weaknesses** or gaps. Your response should comprehensively address different aspects of the business, establishing clear links between the strengths and weaknesses you identify and how those affect planning for the new business activities. The factors you identify will depend on your business and idea, but might include things such as staff capabilities and turnover, organizational culture, production capacity, location, customer loyalty, supply chain relations, financial stability, or ability to acquire funding. Assess the **opportunities** and **threats** that emerging consumer trends and company ethics may present to the success of the new idea.

    B. **Consumer trends**. How might emerging trends in consumer preferences (e.g., buying local, support for green technologies, organic foods, etc.) impact the branding and business success of the new product or service you are launching in the current global marketplace? Justify your response, identifying the trends that are most relevant to your product or service and how they apply to your target market.

    C. **Ethics**. Analyze how perceived ethics violations affect your branding image and ultimate success of your new product or service in a global environment. Support your response with specific examples. For example, do different target populations have different perceptions of what constitutes ethical behavior? How do consumers respond to those violations and what is the impact on business (e.g., product avoidance, lobbying for new regulations, etc.)?

    D. Assess how the factors that you identified above **affect** branding and operations across different departments in the company. How does your business plan take this into account? For example, does organizational structure help or hinder branding and launch activities? Do departments have competing interests? Do they communicate effectively?

V. **Core competencies.** Assess core competencies of the company or new idea that differentiate you from the competition and provide forward momentum in the market. How do those competencies affect your business plan? In other words, what things about the company, product, or service provide significant value to the customer and are very difficult to duplicate? How can you use that strategically?

VI. **Pricing.** Use this section of your business plan to develop and justify a pricing strategy for your new product or service. Be sure to address the following:

    A. Determine the fixed and variable **costs** to the company for producing, marketing, and selling your new good or service. How do those fit with the company's short- and long-term objectives? Support your narrative with a table showing calculations and any assumptions.

    B. Judge how much your target market is willing and able to **pay** for your product or service. Use target market analysis and research on competitors' prices to support your answer.

    C. Evaluate if targeted consumers are willing and able to pay more for your product or service if it (or the organization, more generally) aligns with their **preferences** for corporate social responsibility and ethical behavior. Justify your response with evidence.

    D. In light of your analysis, justify the appropriate pricing **strategy** and price for your product or service and why it is justified. For example, would skimming, penetration, economy, or premium pricing be most appropriate? What should the initial price be?

VII. **Refinement**. This section should highlight processes for reviewing and refining branding and other activities surrounding your new product or service.

    A. Establish processes for how and when you will **evaluate the success** of your new product or service and its branding. Be sure to suggest processes that occur at regular intervals and extend across the business, explaining how results will impact decisions on whether to continue or to initiate exit strategies. What qualitative and quantitative methods will you use?

    B. Specify regular, business-wide **feedback loops** and processes that you will implement to support your new idea, keep it on track, and make mid-course corrections as needed. For example, will you adjust business functions and/or facilitate regular communication across departments?

    C. In planning for the future, determine how will you identify and integrate **other factors** that might affect implementation of your new idea into your business decisions and planning. In other words, what other things do you need to consider when moving forward both internally and externally?

VIII. **Articulation of response**

    A. This Final Project should utilize double spacing, 12-point Times New Roman font, one-inch margins, and APA formatting and source citation requirements.

    B. Make sure to use headings within the paper that correspond with each portion of the rubric.

    C. This paper should be between 30 and 40 pages in length.

Milestones

Milestone One: *Context, Need, Pricing*

In **Module Three**, you will submit a short paper covering context, need, and pricing. This milestone establishes your chosen organization's direction within the marketplace. This is important because it drives the subsequent activities, milestones, and the final project. Without a strong sense of the organization's purpose within the marketplace, knowledge of consumer trends, and how to meet target market needs at the appropriate price, management is less likely to maximize the efficiency of business activities and more likely to miss fully meeting the needs of its chosen target market. This milestone establishes how the organization will differentiate itself from its competition through branding with a unique product or service offering designed to meet specific consumer needs or desires that are shaped by their demographics, psychographics, and want/need. **This milestone will be graded with the Milestone One Rubric.**

Milestone Two: *Strengths and Weaknesses, Core Competencies*

In **Module Five**, you will submit a short paper covering strengths and weaknesses and core competencies. For the company you have chosen, write a short paper that identifies and analyzes at least four, but no more than eight, strengths and weaknesses. Continue your paper by identifying and explaining three to five core competencies for the company you have chosen. **This milestone will be graded with the Milestone Two Rubric.**

Milestone Three: *Refinement*

In **Module Seven**, you will submit a short paper covering refinements. Using the idea that you have chosen, write a short paper covering the following: activities and items upon which success will be evaluated and how these will be evaluated; timing intervals for information gathering and analyzing feedback; feedback

loops that exist or will be created; description of how these loops and the ensuing feedback will affect the overall organization; other considerations as you move forward with your new product or service. **This milestone will be graded with the Milestone Three Rubric.**

Final Project Submission: *Comprehensive Business Plan*

In **Module Nine**, you will submit your final project. It should be a complete, polished artifact containing **all** of the critical elements of the final product. It should reflect the incorporation of feedback gained throughout the course and it will include 10% new content. **This submission will be graded with the Final Project Rubric,** as shown below**.**

Deliverables

Milestone	Deliverable	Module Due	Grading
One	Context, Need, Pricing	3	Graded separately; Milestone One Rubric
Two	Strengths and Weaknesses, Core Competencies	5	Graded separately; Milestone Two Rubric
Three	Refinement	7	Graded separately; Milestone Three Rubric
	Final Submission: Comprehensive Business Plan	9	Graded separately; Final Project Rubric

Final Project Rubric

Guidelines for Submission: Your business plan should be approximately 30 to 40 pages in length (excluding title page, table of contents, tables or spreadsheets, and reference list) with double spacing, 12-point Times New Roman font, and one-inch margins. Use APA formatting for references and citations.

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Executive Summary	Meets "Proficient" criteria and response is especially well-suited for target audience, expertly balancing brevity with necessary detail	Briefly explains key features of business plan and why product or service is better than competition's in eyes of target market	Explains key features of plan and why product or service is better than competition's to target market, but explanation is lengthy, omits essential information, or contains inaccuracies	Does not explain key features of business plan and why product or service is better than competition's in eyes of target market	2

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Context: Brand Description	Meets "Proficient" criteria and demonstrates particularly keen insight into the ways in which branding defines a company's identity and drives business decisions	Describes the key features of company's brand and how these features drive business decisions	Describes the key features of company's brand and how they drive business decisions, but response omits key features, contains inaccuracies, or connections between brand and decisions are perfunctory	Does not describe key features of company's brand and how these features drive business decisions	5.33
Context: Fit	Meets "Proficient" criteria and application of marketing and management analytics to branding and other business decisions is particularly insightful and in-depth	Assesses how new idea fits with company's existing brand and how that impacts business plan, supported by relevant research and analysis	Assesses how new idea fits with company's existing brand and impact on business plan, supported by research and analysis, but response is cursory, omits key details, contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not assess how new idea fits with company's existing brand or how that impacts business plan	5.33
Context: Effectiveness	Meets "Proficient" criteria and draws especially well-supported and insightful connections between existing branding strategies and lessons for new products or services	Evaluates effectiveness of existing branding efforts, including implications for new product or service, supported by relevant analysis	Evaluates effectiveness of existing branding efforts, including implications for new product or service, supported by analysis, but response is cursory, omits key details, contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not evaluate effectiveness of existing branding efforts, including implications for new product or service, supported by analysis	5.34
Need: Target Market: Basic Demographics	Meets "Proficient" criteria and demographic features highlighted are especially salient for defining the unique characteristics of the target market for the specific product or service	Defines key demographic features of target market and analyzes why they are a good choice, supported by relevant research	Defines demographic features of target market and analyzes why they are a good choice, supported by research, but response is cursory, omits critical features, contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not define key demographic features of target market and analyze why they are a good choice	4

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Need: Target Market: Psychographics	Meets "Proficient" criteria and behavioral or psychographic characteristics highlighted are especially salient for defining the unique characteristics of the target market for the specific product or service	Defines other behavioral or psychographic characteristics of target market and analyzes why they are a good choice, supported by relevant research	Defines other behavioral or psychographic characteristics of target market and analyzes why they are a good choice, supported by research, but response is cursory, omits key characteristics, contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not define other behavioral or psychographic characteristics of target market and analyzes why they are a good choice, supported by research	4
Need: Want or Need	Meets "Proficient" criteria and demonstrates especially keen insight into what market research suggests about the needs and wants of a specific target market	Analyzes how new product or service meets a specific want or need of target market, supported by relevant market research	Analyzes how new product or service meets a specific want or need of target market, supported by market research, but response is cursory, omits key details, contains inaccuracies, or support is not relevant	Does not analyze how new product or service meets a specific want or need of target market	4
Need: Why	Meets "Proficient" criteria and demonstrates particularly keen insight into how choice of target market and alignment with its needs and wants impact business decisions and success	Defends choice of target market relative to product success, based on analysis of target market's characteristics, needs, and wants	Defends choice of target market relative to product success based on analysis of target market's characteristics, needs, and wants, but defense is cursory, illogical, contains inaccuracies, or is not well-supported	Does not defend choice of target market relative to product success	4
Strengths and Weaknesses: Assess	Meets "Proficient" criteria and assessment is especially nuanced and well aligned with decision-making needs in planning for the new product or service	Comprehensively assesses company's tangible and intangible strengths and weakness related to new idea, linking them clearly to planning the new business activities	Assesses company's tangible and intangible strengths and weakness, linking them to planning new business activities, but links are unclear or cursory, or response contains inaccuracies or omits key details	Does not assess company's tangible and intangible strengths and weakness related to new idea	5.34

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Strengths and Weaknesses: Consumer Trends	Meets "Proficient" criteria and explanation of the links between consumer trends and branding choices is especially nuanced and relevant for ensuring business success in a global market	Identifies emerging consumer trends and explains how they influence branding and success of new product or service in current global marketplace, identifying most relevant trends and how they apply to target market in justifying response	Identifies emerging consumer trends and explains how they influence branding and success of new product or service in current global marketplace, identifying most relevant trends for target market in justifying response, but response contains inaccuracies, omits key details, or links between trends and influence are tenuous	Does not identify emerging consumer trends or explain how they influence branding and success of new product or service in current global marketplace	5.33
Strengths and Weaknesses: Opportunities: Ethics	Meets "Proficient" criteria and analysis of links between perceived ethics violations and branding image is especially nuanced and relevant for ensuring business success in a global environment	Analyzes how perceived ethics violations might affect branding and ultimate success of new product or service in a global environment, supported by specific examples	Analyzes how perceived ethics violations might affect branding and success of new product or service in a global environment, but analysis is cursory, illogical, contains inaccuracies, or is not supported by specific examples	Does not analyze how perceived ethics violations might affect branding and ultimate success of new product or service in a global environment	5.33
Strengths and Weaknesses: Affect	Meets "Proficient" criteria and assessment is especially nuanced and well-aligned with needs in planning for the new product or service	Assesses how factors identified affect branding and operations across different departments, including how business plan takes this into account	Assesses how factors identified affect branding and operations across departments, including how business plan takes this into account, but response contains inaccuracies, omits key details or link between factors and their impact, and business planning is tenuous	Does not assess how factors identified affect branding and operations across different departments, including how business plan takes this into account	5.33
Core Competencies	Meets "Proficient" criteria and demonstrates keen insight in identifying core competencies and incorporating them strategically in planning for the new product or service	Assesses core competencies of company or new idea that differentiate it from the competition and provide momentum in the market, including how those competencies affect business plan	Assesses core competencies of company or new idea that differentiate it from competition and provide momentum in the market, including how those competencies affect business plan, but response is cursory, illogical, or contains inaccuracies	Does not assess core competencies of company or new idea that differentiate it from the competition and provide long-term sustainability in the market	5.33

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Pricing: Costs	Meets "Proficient" criteria and demonstrates especially keen insight into how business goals and market conditions affect pricing decisions	Determines fixed and variable costs associated with new good or service and how costs fit with company objectives, supporting narrative with table showing calculations and assumptions	Determines fixed and variable costs and how they fit with company objectives, supporting narrative with table showing calculations and assumptions, but response omits key details, contains inaccuracies, or is based on faulty assumptions	Does not determine fixed and variable costs associated with new good or service and how costs fit with company objectives	5.33
Pricing: Pay	Meets "Proficient" criteria and response is particularly nuanced and well supported by target market analysis and research	Judges how much target market is willing and able to pay for product or service, using target market analysis and research on close competitors' prices to justify response	Judges how much target market is willing and able to pay for product or service, using target market analysis and research on close competitors' prices to justify response, but response is cursory, contains inaccuracies, or is not well-supported by research and analysis	Does not judge how much target market is willing and able to pay for product or service	5.33
Pricing: Preferences	Meets "Proficient" criteria and discussion of the links between consumer's concern for corporate social responsibility and pricing decisions is especially nuanced and well supported by analysis and research	Evaluates whether targeted consumers are willing and able to pay more for product or service if it aligns with their preferences for corporate social responsibility, justifying response with evidence	Evaluates whether targeted consumers are willing and able to pay more for product or service if it aligns with their preferences for corporate social responsibility, justifying response with evidence, but response is cursory, contains inaccuracies, or is not well-supported by evidence	Does not evaluate whether targeted consumers are willing and able to pay more for product or service if it aligns with their preferences for corporate social responsibility	5.34
Pricing: Strategy	Meets "Proficient" criteria and justification is particularly well aligned with business goals and supported by market analysis	Justifies pricing strategy and price selection for new product or service in light of analysis	Justifies pricing strategy and price selection for new product or service in light of analysis, but justification is cursory, illogical, contains inaccuracies, or is poorly supported	Does not justify pricing strategy and price selection for new product or service in light of analysis	5.34

Critical Elements	Exemplary (100%)	Proficient (90%)	Needs Improvement (70%)	Not Evident (0%)	Value
Refinement: Evaluate the Success	Meets "Proficient" criteria and qualitative and quantitative procedures established are particularly conducive to promoting regular review and continuous improvement in the specific company	Establishes business-wide qualitative and quantitative procedures for evaluating success of new product or service at regular intervals, explaining how results will impact decisions on whether and how to continue or exit	Establishes procedures for evaluating success, explaining how results will impact decisions to continue or exit, but procedures do not extend across business, are not both qualitative and quantitative, do not occur at regular intervals, or are not reasonable for making business decisions	Does not establish qualitative and quantitative procedures for evaluating success of new product or service, explaining how results will impact decisions on whether and how to continue or exit	5.33
Refinement: Feedback Loops	Meets "Proficient" criteria and procedures established are particularly conducive to promoting regular review and continuous improvement in the specific company	Specifies regular, five-step feedback loops and other processes to support the new idea, keep it on track, and make mid-course corrections as needed	Specifies feedback loops and other processes to support the new idea, keep it on track, and make mid-course corrections as needed, but procedures are not five-step, do not occur at regular intervals, or are not reasonable for making business decisions	Does not specify feedback loops and other processes to support the new idea, keep it on track, and make mid-course corrections as needed	5.34
Refinement: Other Factors	Meets "Proficient" criteria and procedures are particularly conducive to informing planning and fostering continuous improvement in the specific company	Determines procedures for identifying other factors that might affect new idea and integrating them into decision-making and planning	Determines procedures for identifying and integrating other factors that might affect new idea into decision-making and planning, but procedures suggested are cursory, illogical, or are not well-suited for improving performance	Does not determine procedures for identifying other factors that might affect implementation of new idea and integrating them into decision-making and planning	5.33
Articulation of Response	Submission is free of errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, and organization and is presented in a professional and easy-to-read format	Submission has no major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization	Submission has major errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that negatively impact readability and articulation of main ideas	Submission has critical errors related to citations, grammar, spelling, syntax, or organization that prevent understanding of ideas	2
				Earned Total	**100%**