

Top Performers

by Tricia Bisoux

A business school's professors are the lifeblood of its educational programs and scholarly productivity. However, today's business professors do more than teach and conduct research. They also mentor, consult, talk with media, attend conferences, complete paperwork, head committees, champion initiatives, and travel. Amidst all this activity, they also must reserve enough energy to build lives *outside* the business school.

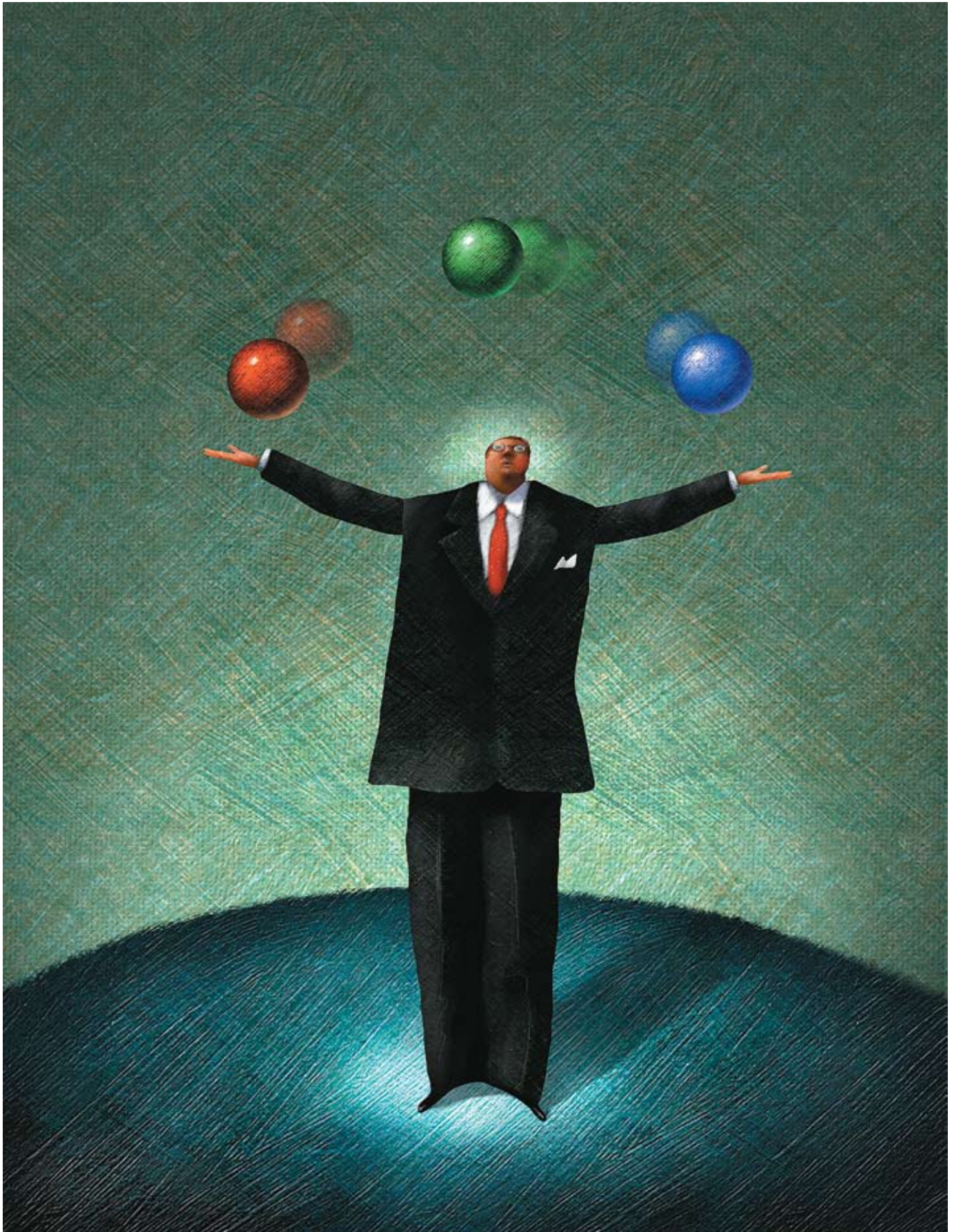
But how can schools help their professors juggle such diverse responsibilities, cultivating and fostering their talents while building on their strengths? More administrators are grappling with this question as they realize the importance of developing the right mix of faculty with the right mix of talent, says Stephen Stumpf of the Villanova School of Business in Pennsylvania.

"More schools are starting to adopt a portfolio model for their faculty," says Stumpf, a professor of management and operations at Villanova and the business school's former dean. Such a portfolio, he explains, can include academically qualified faculty, professionally qualified faculty, and adjuncts whose teaching and research loads vary according to their skill sets. "Under this model, faculty development is more about managing your portfolio of professors to accomplish the level of teaching that you want."

Many faculty members, too, are looking for new ways to enhance their skill sets, says Kathleen Sutcliffe, the associate dean for faculty development and research at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business in Ann Arbor. "Professors are much more interested in how they make material applicable to real-world situations," she says. "Their roles have expanded, and they now see themselves more as mentors, collaborators, and co-creators of the learning experience. They want to connect to students, to develop true learners rather than just masters of the material."

To help faculty members fulfill their potential inside and outside the classroom, Stumpf, Sutcliffe, and other educators suggest that business schools make faculty development an essential part of their strategic planning. They outline eight key areas where business schools can get the most return on their investment in their professors' talents and potential.

To cultivate professors with stamina and star power, a business school must find creative ways to support their personal and professional development.



1. Treat Teachers as Learners

Most faculty members can benefit from learning new approaches to teaching, whether they've taught for one year or ten years, says Stefano Gatti, the director of the International Teachers Programme (ITP) at SDA Bocconi in Milan, Italy. By creating opportunities for its professors to update their teaching techniques, a business school can enhance student learning, improve programs, and inject new ideas into the classroom. "A school may have strong researchers on its faculty, but that alone won't take a school's programs to the next level," Gatti says. "To develop top MBA and executive programs, a school also must have talented teachers."

Training faculty to communicate more effectively is a prominent part of ITP, says Gatti. Teachers who can create synergistic relationships between business concepts and real-world business problems can make substantial and lasting contributions to the quality and visibility of a school's programs, he says. "A good teacher can transmit these concepts much more effectively than someone who is a pure theorist," he says.

Gatti learned that lesson firsthand as a participant in the ITP in 2003. Until then, he had been using a lecture format in his investment banking course—he gave students clear direction, but he did not actively invite their participation. In the ITP, he learned new communication and lecture techniques, which led him to "radically modify" his approach to teaching. He now brings articles from the morning's newspaper to class and asks students to read the articles, exchange ideas, and contribute to a larger discussion.

Gatti's students now tell him they don't just enjoy his classes more—they also learn more. "I wasn't accustomed to using such active learning techniques," he says. "My interactions with my students are now much more fluid and participatory."

Schools can provide a range of opportunities to help faculty update and improve their teaching techniques, including off-site workshops, field trips, and conferences, as well as on-campus seminars and mentoring programs. For example, the Ross School encourages faculty to invite master teachers to observe them in their classrooms and offer constructive feedback on their methods and delivery. The school also hosts a series of two-day teaching seminars where professors discuss best practices with teaching specialists, says Sutcliffe.

"I recently arranged a workshop for faculty that will explore biases and examine how we can open our minds to new information," she says. "These seminars are designed to help even our best faculty learn how to teach better and stay at the top of their games."

2. Design New Experiences

Many business schools are requiring students to travel to different countries and experience other cultures. It's becoming just as important for faculty to go beyond their comfort zones and broaden their own perspectives through global travel, says Sutcliffe. To that end, the Ross School is sending 13 faculty members to China. Before they leave, they will engage in a number of learning activities; while in China, they will meet with corporate executives and government policymakers. If the experience goes well, says Sutcliffe, the school will continue to coordinate overseas field trips for faculty in the future.

At many schools, it's just as essential that faculty obtain firsthand experience of different corporate cultures, says Earl Simendinger, a professor of management at the University of Tampa's Sykes School of Business in Florida and a presenter at AACSB seminars on teaching effectiveness. He advocates "practitioner sabbaticals" that give faculty time off to consult. "Some universities discourage consulting, but I think that's a big mistake," he says. "We should actually encourage teachers to consult, because they'll be better professors if they do what they teach." Moreover, he adds, they can bring their real-world experiences directly into the classroom.

If consulting is not an option, Gatti suggests that schools invite faculty members to assume administrative roles at the institution itself. It's ironic for a professor with no management experience to teach the practice of management, Gatti argues. "By exposing their faculty to the real management of an institution," he says, "business schools can contribute to their faculty's professional development."

More open-ended sabbaticals also can be an important part of a faculty development plan, says Sutcliffe. The Ross School, for example, offers sabbaticals to faculty who have been employed at the school for at least six years. In return, the school reaps the benefits of professors who come back to campus re-energized. "We encourage faculty to use a sabbatical as a time to retool their skills, pursue new kinds of learning, and conduct their research projects," she says. "We want to give them the chance to reflect on what brings them energy and excitement."

3. Create a Strong Portfolio

To develop a strong faculty, business schools must consider carefully the mix of talents and contributions they need from their faculty members to achieve their missions, says Stumpf of Villanova. Few professors are equally adept teachers and scholars, he argues. More often, they are one or the other—or a little bit of both. "The portfolio model sees faculty as scholars, teacher-scholars, scholar-teachers, or teachers," says

A Week in the Life of a Business Professor

In the past, when business professors weren't in the classroom, they most likely spent the day barricaded behind their office doors working on their latest research projects. Today, say faculty development experts, business professors must address a wider array of responsibilities. As a result, a week in their lives might look quite different:

Monday

7:00 a.m. – Take yoga class to renew energy and prepare to face the week ahead.

9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

– Work on research at home.

2:00 p.m. – Visit with a corporate partner regarding a consulting project that could make an interesting case study. "Academically qualified faculty members should be as up-to-date as possible with findings, both theoretical and empirical, in their fields," says Frank Navratil of John Carroll University. "They should look for opportunities to interact with practitioners who can show how academic theories and principles are being implemented in the business world."

Tuesday

8:30 a.m. – Check the

daily news to clip articles relevant to that afternoon's MBA class. "Faculty need to dedicate a reasonable part of their day to reading newspapers and staying updated on what's taking place outside their offices," says Stefano Gatti of SDA Bocconi.

11:00 a.m. – Meet with technical assistant to set up student response system for that afternoon's MBA course. "Technological support gives faculty a step up to integrate tools that can improve their classes," says Earl Simendinger of the University of Tampa.

2:00 p.m. – Teach MBA course, using student response system and lecture capture technology. After class, upload relevant course materials to the lecture, now available online.

4:30 p.m. – Hold office hours. Check and answer student e-mails. Update Facebook page to let students know of upcoming seminar.

Wednesday

9:00 a.m. – Attend administrative meeting on new school policy. Administrative meetings aren't high on the list of faculty favorites, but they give professors the



chance to practice management. Says Gatti, "If faculty can participate in the management of the institutions, they can become better managers themselves."

1:00 p.m. – Teach MBA course.

3:00 p.m. – Speak with local reporter on how latest research applies to current events.

Thursday

12:00 p.m. – Video conference with colleagues in Europe to discuss a global, cross-disciplinary research project. "Research grounds faculty," says Kathleen Sutcliffe of the University of Michigan. "They use it to form a basis of their intellectual life and to create intellectual impact."

2:00 p.m. – Administer leadership simulation to undergraduate students.

4:00 p.m. – Meet with students to help them plan a travel experience in China next summer.

7:00 p.m. – Take a French language class. "Professors can get so involved in the day-to-day activities of teaching and research that they forget they also need to learn something new," says Sutcliffe. "It doesn't have to be business. It just needs to be something to help them renew their passion, excitement, and energy."

Friday

Spend the day at home to plan next week's courses, conduct research, and spend time with family.

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—Earl Simendinger of the University of Tampa

Stumpf. “If a school wants to raise the average performance of its entire faculty, it needs to create the right blend of professors.” That mix includes not only academically qualified professors, but also practitioners and adjuncts.

Frank Navratil of John Carroll University’s Boler School of Business in University Heights, Ohio, points out that AACSB International’s new accreditation standards regarding professionally qualified faculty make it easier for a business school to build a strong portfolio of professors—and reduce the workload on individual faculty members. “I see these standards moving business schools toward the professional models of medical and law schools, which make much greater use of part-time and full-time professionally qualified faculty members,” he says.

Business schools in other countries already use part-time and full-time PQ faculty more extensively than U.S. business schools do, Navratil says. He adds that PQ faculty can assume more responsibilities in the business school if they are given opportunities to hone their skills. If U.S. schools don’t take full advantage of the contributions of PQ faculty, they risk shifting more responsibilities onto academically qualified faculty, many of whom are already overwhelmed.

However, even with the new standards, administrators often forget their PQs in the faculty development equation, Navratil says. “I’m not sure many institutions are as willing to support PQ faculty members who are trying to maintain their qualifications as they are AQ faculty,” he argues. “Most business schools have needs in this area, but they haven’t been terribly creative in addressing those needs.”

4. Focus on Strengths, Not Weaknesses

The portfolio model represents a shift in the way business schools have traditionally viewed their professors, say these educators. In the era of 360-degree feedback, businesses and business schools often have tried to identify and shore up people’s weaknesses. In today’s competitive market, business schools could do more to improve their curricula by paying attention to their professors’ inherent strengths.

Navratil compares business schools to baseball teams, where managers refer to “five-tool” players who can hit for average, hit for power, have good speed, have strong throwing arms, and exhibit excellent fielding skills. “These five-tool players are rare—the ‘superstars’ of the sport,” he says. “More common are the talented ballplayers who are deficient in some areas, but make important contributions to their teams by focusing on what they do best.”

Simendinger of the Sykes School agrees that a school can make its programs more effective by assigning teaching,

research, and administrative responsibilities to those with the most appropriate skills. “Let good teachers teach four classes a semester, while good researchers teach only two,” he says. “All faculty can make the greatest contributions when they are allowed to emphasize their better points.”

Sutcliffe adds that a “strength-based approach” can help any school build a well-rounded portfolio of faculty who are truly passionate about what they do. “We need to recognize that it’s more effective to take advantage of each faculty member’s unique skills and capabilities,” she says.

5. Fully Tap Support Systems

Administrators can help professors do their jobs even better by making support systems and technological upgrades an ongoing part of the budget. Simendinger suggests that, ideally, a business school’s development budget should cover four key areas of faculty support: conference attendance, grants for special research projects, support staff who can provide technological and instructional assistance, and secretarial staff who can complete paperwork related to research and learning assessment. “When I talk to faculty at the teaching effectiveness seminars, their No. 1 issue is that they have so many meetings and so much paperwork, they can’t focus on their research and teaching,” he says.

Dedicated staff who can help faculty solve problems quickly can be an invaluable asset, says Sutcliffe. Faculty at the Ross School, for example, can hire research or teaching assistants for up to 200 hours per year on the school’s payroll. Ross also has on staff an instructional development coordinator who schedules teaching seminars that tackle topics related to educational delivery, works one-on-one with faculty who want to improve their classroom performance, and arranges mentor relationships between more experienced and less experienced faculty.

Technological assistance is equally important, adds Simendinger. Tech-savvy students sometimes can outmaneuver professors who don’t know their way around an iPhone or an SMS screen. “It can be a little harder for older guys like me to keep up,” Simendinger says. A tech support staff experienced with classroom technologies can keep a school’s faculty—and its curricula—on the cutting edge.

While some schools may need to start from scratch on building a support staff, most already have resources at hand, says Stumpf of Villanova. The larger community around the business school—which might include colleges of education, arts and sciences departments, and offices devoted to tech support and teaching excellence—can provide a wide range of assistance.

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—Stephen Stumpf, Villanova University

“I have learned so much about teaching from my arts and sciences colleagues—from observing professors in departments like physics and math,” Stumpf says. “Business schools can use resources already in place to enhance the quality of their faculty’s teaching.”

6. Use Student Ratings Wisely

Student evaluations are to professors as the rankings are to business schools—they’re considered both tools for constructive feedback *and* sources of subjective opinion. Because student evaluations are used not only to help faculty identify areas to improve, but also to make decisions regarding promotion and compensation, they must be used very carefully, says Stumpf.



“With student evaluations,” he says, “you don’t know if you’re measuring the quality of learning or something else.” How students evaluate their teachers can be unduly influenced by the grades they expect, the level to which they agreed or disagreed with the professor’s worldview, the difficulty of the coursework, or even the time of day the course was offered.

The key, says Stumpf, is to establish an evaluation system that takes these kinds of influences into account. On course evaluations at Villanova, for instance, students aren’t just asked to evaluate their professors’ teaching. They’re also asked a broader range of questions, including how challenging they found the course, how hard they had to work, and how intellectually stimulating they found the material. Such questions can help protect professors from the lower ratings that more

difficult courses or personality differences might generate.

Administrators must also keep in mind the public nature of student evaluations, Stumpf argues. Unlike performance reviews in a business—which might be read by only an employee and his boss—student evaluations are very public, read by department chairs and faculty review committees. Online sites such as RateMyProfessors.com expand that visibility to the Internet at large, where anonymous posters can be both incredibly laudatory and downright brutal.

“Because these rating systems are so public, a professor’s esteem and reputation are on the line,” says Stumpf. Therefore, evaluations are most beneficial when they are used to help professors look for trends and work on areas where they consistently receive lower ratings. For example, when Stumpf

himself once got lower student ratings than he had expected, he read the students’ comments carefully. He discovered that something he had said in one lecture had been interpreted much differently than he had intended.

“I now know how that comment came across—I’ll never do that again!” he says. “These numbers tell us a story. The challenge for faculty is to be able to look at the numbers and ask, ‘What did I do? How can I make it better next time?’” The role of a dean or department chair, he adds, is to use student ratings not as a basis for punishment, but as a way to identify those professors

who are truly interested in analyzing their ratings, identifying problems, and taking steps to improve via classroom observations, targeted workshops, or other measures. These professors, he says, are the ones who will contribute more to the business school over the long term.

7. Develop the Individual

Scheduling face-to-face sessions with each faculty member can be one of the best contributions administrators can make to their faculty development efforts. These individualized sessions can be as simple as an administrator sitting down with each professor and asking, “What do you need today to be better at what you do?” says Simendinger. “Faculty development is a very individual process—what might motivate me may not motivate someone else.”

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Sutcliffe agrees, noting that professors at the Ross School submit annual reports that keep the administration updated about what's happening with their projects and what they need to thrive in their jobs. The school also has taken the individual development of its faculty one step further: It plans to open a fitness facility and offer a series of personal wellness seminars for faculty. "Faculty can better maintain their energy through exercise, yoga, meditation, and healthful eating," says Sutcliffe. "That's going to be a focus of our school."

8. Target Potential

Any organization's staff breaks down into three groups—those with superior abilities, those with great potential, and those who are just doing their jobs. In most cases, a school can maximize its faculty development budget by focusing its efforts on those faculty members with the most enthusiasm and potential, says Stumpf of Villanova.

"Not all professors will benefit from development efforts. In most schools, there is that top 10 percent of faculty members who are exceptional. They should be tapped as role models and mentors, but they don't necessarily need development," he says. "Then, there are those professors who aren't ready learners—they're not interested in development or motivated to become better teachers." Those in the middle are the ones taking risks and striving to be better—and the ones who are looking for opportunities to grow, Stumpf argues.

To identify these ready learners and risk-takers, Stumpf advises administrators to look for professors whose student evaluations vary from course to course. "When I look at professors who are getting 4.9 ratings in every course, I have to ask, 'Are they really the best teachers? Or have they just found a way to satisfy their students?' Instead, I focus on the teachers whose ratings vary—say, from 4.4 to 4.6—and whose teaching loads vary. These are the people who have the ability to teach a wide variety of people on a wide variety of topics." As ready learners, Stumpf says, they'll appreciate faculty development as a reward, not view it as an obligation.

A Head Start

Many forces have aligned to push business faculty in new directions: internationalization, technological innovation, accelerated communication, and a host of other "ations" that are sure to come. That means that professors must do more and more to keep their teaching, research, and other activities at the forefront of business.

However, those schools that develop the right support systems will give their faculty a head start. When given opportunities to renew their skills, refresh their perspectives, and revive their passion for their disciplines, high-performing faculty members don't just further their own professional goals. They also help business schools advance their programs, build their reputations, and enhance their brands. 