

## Summary of LARC Regional Program Advisory on Marketing and Publishing

April 4th, 2025

### Summary

The LARC Regional Program Advisory on Marketing and Publishing brought together industry and education stakeholders to forge a collaborative path forward for workforce development in LA County. The session began with data-rich presentations from the LAEDC and the Center of Excellence, which established a landscape of contrast: a high-wage, digitally driven industry facing significant racial diversity challenges, and a community college system producing a talented, highly diverse pool of graduates ready to meet that need.

The subsequent roundtable with industry leaders from BAMKO, the Los Angeles Business Journal, and Task Force provided critical on-the-ground context. A central theme was the complex impact of technology, with a nuanced discussion on how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being simultaneously embraced as an efficiency tool while being restricted in areas like journalism due to ethical concerns. Panelists detailed the specific hard and soft skills required to succeed, from proficiency in platforms like Shopify and HubSpot to universal needs for adaptability, curiosity, and business acumen. The conversation culminated in a robust discussion of actionable strategies to build a more equitable talent pipeline, emphasizing the dual responsibility of both industry (hiring practices, outreach) and education (exposure, mentorship, curriculum), especially in a climate of retreating formal DEI initiatives. The advisory concluded with a clear call for creative, multi-faceted partnerships to increase student exposure and build effective career pathways.

### Key Insights into Emerging Trends

- **Dual-Sided Impact of AI:** AI is not being adopted uniformly. It is a "double-edged sword."
  - **Embraced for Efficiency:** In marketing, advertising, and sales, it's used for thought-starting, ad generation, creating business proposals, and increasing team efficiency.
  - **Restricted for Integrity:** In content creation and journalism, its use is often forbidden due to the inability to verify sources, which is critical for journalistic integrity.
- **Pragmatic Approach to AI Ethics:** Panelists advised against ignoring AI on ethical grounds, as this would be a career-limiting mistake. The focus should be on using it as a "thought partner," understanding its limitations, and developing skills (like video) that are harder for AI to replicate, allowing professionals to stand out from the "AI slop."

- **Digital Dominance & E-commerce Integration:** The shift to digital is absolute. This includes the rise of multimedia companies (podcasts, events), the critical importance of the creator/influencer economy, and the boom in integrated e-commerce that requires skills in merchandising, logistics, and supply chain management.
- **Niche Industries:** The broader marketing industry contains many highly specialized sub-sectors (e.g., promotional products) with their own internal networks and specific experience requirements, which represent untapped career pathways for students.

## Workforce Needs

- **Hard Skills / Technical Proficiency:**
  - **Platform Expertise:** Explicitly mentioned were **Shopify, Etsy** (e-commerce); **Mailchimp, HubSpot** (marketing automation); **WordPress** (web content); and **QuickBooks** (business finance).
  - **Digital Marketing Fundamentals:** SEO, social media advertising, and navigating various backend platforms.
- **Essential Soft Skills (Emphasized as paramount):**
  - **Curiosity & Eagerness to Learn/Lifelong Learning:** The most frequently cited trait.
  - **Adaptability & Flexibility:** To evolve with a dynamic industry.
  - **AI Literacy & Media Literacy:** Not just using AI, but understanding its limitations, knowing the desired end result, verifying its outputs, and maintaining a human connection.
  - **Empathy and Communication (The "AI Liaison"):** The ability to bridge the gap between new tech adopters and legacy staff who are resistant to AI, requiring an ability to "speak both languages."
  - **Business Acumen:** A fundamental understanding of how businesses operate was highlighted as a critical skill for employees in *any* role.
  - **Professionalism & Confidence:** The ability to be personable, communicate effectively with senior leaders, and navigate a professional environment.

## Growth Areas

- **Marketing Consulting Services**
- **E-commerce and Related Services** (Merchandising, Logistics)
- **Creator / Influencer Economy**
- **Digital Content & Multimedia**
- **In-House Marketing Roles:** Panelists noted that nearly every company, including universities and non-profits, has an in-house marketing team, representing a vast landscape of opportunity.

## In-demand Soft Skills and Credentials

- **Soft Skills:** Curiosity, Adaptability, AI/Media Literacy, Empathy, Business Acumen, and Professionalism are paramount.
- **Credentials:** There is a nuanced view on credentials:
  - **Formal Degrees (Associate & Bachelor's):** Valued as a foundation. A community college background is seen as a strong asset.
  - **A Minor in Business:** Suggested as a powerful complement to any degree.
  - **Platform-Specific Certifications:** Can provide a competitive edge.
  - **A Tangible Portfolio:** Highly valuable as proof of practical skills.

## Strategies for Equity

- **For Industry / Employers:**
  - **Build Intentional Referral Programs:** The most concrete strategy discussed. BAMKO uses an incentivized employee referral program, empowering their diverse staff to mentor and refer other diverse candidates. As Tori Feeney stated, "Good people know good people."
  - **Analyze Internal Demographics:** Jaylene Castro advised organizations to "do some of the work internally" by looking at their own representation and tapping into underrepresented staff for their networks.
  - **Ensure Staff Represents the Audience:** Dana Coffman stressed that if a company is targeting the diverse LA market, its staff must reflect that audience to be effective.
  - **Expand Recruitment Partnerships:** Employers must expand partnerships beyond traditional universities to reach more diverse student populations and address the "funnel issue" of non-diverse applicant pools.
- **For Educators / Community Colleges:**
  - **Increase Exposure via Work-Based Learning Continuum:** Panelists and moderators agreed that increasing exposure is key. This goes beyond internships to include a full spectrum of WBL: **guest lectures, workplace tours, mock interviews, and capstone projects.**
  - **Diversify the Curriculum:** Jaylene Castro gave a powerful recommendation to diversify the literature and guest speakers in the classroom. When students from marginalized communities see and hear from successful people who share their background, it "empowers" them to recognize that these career paths are achievable.

## Work-Based Learning (WBL)

- **A Full Spectrum is Needed:** WBL should not be seen as just internships, but a continuum of exposure opportunities (guest lectures, tours, etc.) that build student confidence and awareness.
- **Industry Openness:** While formal partnerships with community colleges are not currently widespread among the panelists, they expressed a clear willingness to collaborate on developing them, starting with brainstorming internship programs and participating as guest lecturers.
- **Apprenticeships:** Formal apprenticeship models are a newer concept for the industry. They are seen as most viable in project-based departments like creative/graphics or website operations, but potentially challenging for long-term, client-facing roles.
- **On-the-Job Learning is the Norm:** Especially in smaller, agile companies, most professional development happens through hands-on experience.

## List of Challenges

- **The AI Dilemma:** Navigating the ethical and practical challenges of AI, particularly balancing its efficiency benefits with the need for accuracy and source integrity.
- **Significant Racial Equity Gaps:** The industry remains far less diverse than the LA County workforce, a major challenge that requires intentional, sustained effort.
- **The "Funnel Issue":** Employers are not seeing applicant pools that are as diverse as the region, indicating a need for better outreach.
- **Lack of Exposure:** Students from underrepresented backgrounds may not even consider marketing as a viable career because they lack role models and exposure to the industry.
- **The DEI Rollback Climate:** Dana Coffman noted that as formal DEI initiatives are being "clawed back" at large organizations, the responsibility to drive equity falls more heavily on "interested individuals and companies," making these informal and grassroots partnerships even more critical.

## Conclusion

The LARC Advisory on Marketing and Publishing successfully moved from identifying problems to proposing concrete solutions. The industry is dynamic and lucrative but is grappling with the profound impact of AI and a critical need to build a more equitable workforce. The advisory established that LA's community colleges are a direct and powerful solution to the industry's diversity problem. The path forward requires a dual commitment: industry must actively change its recruitment practices by expanding outreach and empowering diverse employee networks, while educators must focus on increasing student exposure through a full spectrum of work-based learning and by diversifying curriculum to provide visible role models.

In a climate where formal DEI initiatives may be waning, these creative, grassroots partnerships are not just beneficial—they are essential for building a robust, equitable talent pipeline that ensures the marketing and publishing industry reflects and effectively serves the diverse community of Los Angeles.