



Artificial Intelligence for Customer Growth

GBUS 8561 A

2026 MBA - Qtr 2

Full-Time MBA

Instructor

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Course Description

Marketing is undergoing a profound paradigm shift. From 2022 to 2025, AI has moved beyond a mere buzzword to become a critical driver of growth—enabling strategies that were once unthinkable. Across the United States, companies are weaving AI into their marketing DNA, from Silicon Valley tech giants launching AI-powered ad platforms to retail and media firms crafting personalized customer experiences. In China, industry leaders like Alibaba and ByteDance are using AI to engage hundreds of millions of users with unprecedented precision.

At its core, *growth marketing* employs steady, data-driven tactics to attract, engage, and retain customers at every stage of the funnel. *Growth hacking*, as a subset of growth marketing, emphasizes rapid experimentation—constantly testing and refining strategies until something clicks. In this elective course, you will learn how to successfully lead an end-to-end growth program, with an emphasis on customer assets.

AI has dramatically amplified the impact of these strategies. While the principles of rapid experimentation, data-informed decision making, and creative problem-solving remain the same, AI now provides a turbo boost of automation, granularity, and foresight. Tasks that once required large teams and weeks of effort can now be executed by algorithms in minutes. Campaigns

adapt in real time, learning from every interaction to improve continuously. This means businesses can scale faster, reach the right audiences with the right messages, and do so with greater efficiency. In today's competitive landscape, those who skillfully leverage AI will achieve outsized growth, while those who ignore it risk falling behind.

Throughout the course, we will explore classic CRM fundamentals—acquisition, activation, development, and retention—alongside advanced tools such as generative AI, AI agents, and multi-armed bandits. You'll learn to run continuous optimization experiments and tailor experiences to individual users. Moreover, you'll discover how to gauge Customer Lifetime Value (CLV), measure genuine engagement, and turn these insights into tangible growth strategies.

This new era also brings new responsibilities. Ethical considerations are no longer afterthoughts; they are integral to any viable AI strategy. Today's marketers must collaborate not only with designers and analysts but also with data privacy officers and ethicists. A campaign's success is measured not just in conversion metrics, but also by its respect for user consent and its ability to uphold brand trust.

Through cases, simulations, and hands-on exercises, you will see how modern marketing teams balance bold innovation with consumer trust. If you are eager to lead the next wave of customer-centric, AI-savvy marketing, this course is designed for you.

This course is designed for the next generation of marketing and tech leaders. Whether you aspire to be a marketing manager, product manager, entrepreneur, general manager, or hold a tech role, this course will equip you with AI-driven strategies to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. It is also ideal for future consultants and investment bankers interested in evaluating or acquiring AI products and customer bases. Finally, if you're just curious about how AI is reshaping business and eager to explore innovative techniques to drive growth, then this course is also for you.

Course Objectives

- **Understand Key AI-Driven Concepts:** Gain familiarity with generative AI, AI agents, and real-time optimization techniques (e.g., multi-armed bandits) and how they disrupt traditional marketing tactics.
- **Apply Customer-Centric Growth Frameworks:** Use foundational metrics like Customer Lifetime Value (CLV), engagement analytics, and network effects to inform AI-powered marketing strategies.
- **Develop Experimentation & Optimization Skills:** Learn to design and interpret AI-driven experiments, including dynamic bandit approaches that continuously refine marketing interventions in real time.

- **Create Personalized Customer Experiences:** Leverage generative AI to produce tailored content, messaging, and campaigns that foster deeper relationships with diverse customer segments.
- **Navigate Ethical and Privacy Challenges:** Identify risks of algorithmic bias, data misuse, and privacy erosion; implement responsible AI governance to maintain trust and compliance.
- **Envision the Future of Customer Growth:** Stay ahead of emerging trends in generative AI, autonomous agents, and always-on experimentation, positioning yourself and your organization for continuous innovation in marketing.

Grading and Evaluation

Grade Components

Component	Weight	Group / Individual	Due Date
Individual Participation	40%	Individual	Ongoing
Individual Quizzes	20%	Individual	End of Modules
Group Final Project	40%	Group	Final Week

Group Project

Below are two project options to help you apply AI-driven growth techniques in a collaborative setting. Each group can choose one option, both of which emphasize experimentation, creativity, and ethical considerations.

Option 1: Growth Campaign with AI

Design and implement (or simulate) a multi-channel marketing campaign that leverages AI. Begin by selecting a product or brand, real or fictional, and outline a data-informed strategy to acquire and engage customers. Integrate generative AI (e.g., for copywriting), continuous testing methods (e.g., multi-armed bandits), and real-time adaptation based on user feedback. Conclude with a pitch or report summarizing campaign performance, lessons learned, and ethical considerations.

Option 2: Field Study on AI Adoption in Marketing

Conduct a field study assessing how an organization could incorporate AI into its marketing. Identify a real company, interview stakeholders (marketers, data scientists, etc.), and analyze existing practices and pain points. Develop an AI adoption roadmap with steps for data infrastructure, pilot projects, and responsible governance. Present findings in a consulting-style paper or presentation that details opportunities, challenges, and potential ROI.

Deliverables for Both Options

Groups will produce a final slide deck + a 2 min "TikTok style" video, illustrating their chosen project's rationale, implementation steps, measurable outcomes (or projected results), and ethical considerations. The final submission should reflect a cohesive, data-driven approach and demonstrate how AI can meaningfully enhance marketing outcomes.

Required Readings

These materials are subject to change. Please refer to Canvas session pages for the most current information.

- **Session 1 | Course Introduction & the New AI Landscape for Growth**
 - Topic: Setting the Stage for AI-driven customer growth
 - Case: AI and Brand Management: Promises and Perils (HBS 525-021)
- **Session 2 | Measuring and Forecasting Customer Value**
 - Othellonia - Growing a Mobile Game (HBS 520-016)
- **Session 3 | e-Commerce, Product Management and Artificial Intelligence**
 - The YES: Reimagining the Future of E-Commerce with AI (HBS 521-070)
- **Session 4 | Personalized Retention & Churn Management**
 - Managing Customer Retention at Teleko (HBS 523-005)
- **Session 5 | Generative AI in Creative & Content Marketing**
 - GenAI Competitive Roleplay
- **Session 6 | AI-Driven Pricing and Promotion**
 - PittaRosso: Artificial Intelligence-Driven Pricing and Promotion (HBS 522-046)
- **Session 7 | AI Agents for Customer Growth**
 - AGENTS, Inc.: Pathways to Growth at an AI Startup (HBS 724-444)
- **Session 8 | Algorithmic Bias & Unintended Consequences**
 - Unintended Consequences of Personalized Interventions (HBS 524-052)
- **Session 9 | Data Privacy & Trust Challenges with Generative AI**
 - Amazon Shopper Panel (HBS 521-058)
- **Session 10 | Building Responsible AI Marketing Systems**
 - The Clueless: Navigating an Ethical AI Marketing Dilemma (Ivey W39696)
- **Session 11 | Building and Managing an AI Ecosystem for Customer Growth**

- Amperity: First-Party Data at a Crossroads (HBS 524-017)
- **Session 12 | Advanced Growth Hacking Workshop**
- **Session 13 | Looking Ahead--Emerging AI Trends**
- **Session 14 | Course Wrap-up and Key Takeaways**

Printed Coursepacks

Printed coursepacks are **required** for this course and are available for download.

To obtain a PDF of the coursepack:

1. Click the “Study.Net Materials” link in the lefthand menu
2. Select the “Download eReader” option.

Printed coursepacks can be ordered and purchased through UVA Printing & Copying Services. Follow these [step-by-step instructions](#) for how to submit your eReader to UVA PCS for printing. Contact PCS with questions at 434-924-7186.

Course Policies

Laptop Policy

As a general rule, this class has a laptop-down policy, and you may not use laptops during class. Please bring any printed course materials or notes you may need for reference during class. In specific sessions that will be indicated to students, laptops will be allowed.

Generative AI Policy

The use of AI is not only strongly encouraged in this class—it is essential for mastering the future of business. We want you to explore, experiment, and push your limits with AI tools. For the Group Final Paper, each group **must** incorporate AI. You are required to disclose which platform(s) you used, describe how you employed the tool, share any surprising outcomes, and list any additional sources with a full reference bibliography. Remember: AI systems make mistakes. They can be vague, hallucinate, or generate inexact or even harmful content. **Students remain sole responsible of the output generated by AI systems.**

Please note, however, that during the in-class Individual Quiz, no computer-based tool (other than a basic calculator) is permitted. Uploading cases to AI systems is also not allowed.

Darden & UVA Policies

Darden Attendance and Grade Policies

Attendance, grade, class recording request, and parental support policies may be found on the [Second Year Full-Time MBA](#) Darden Portal.

UVA Honor System

Honor is a core value and foundational element of the student experience at UVA. Learn more about the [Honor Committee](#) and read the [Academic Integrity Norms of the Darden School](#) statement.

Accessible and Safe Learning Environment

As your instructor, I am committed to providing a safe learning environment where all are welcomed and valued. I care about your success and well-being and encourage you to contact me to discuss individual concerns or requests with respect to the course.

This includes letting me know if you have a disability-related request for accommodation or an accommodation request for pregnancy (including childbirth or related medical conditions), or religion. For disability and pregnancy-related accommodations, you may also contact the [Student Disability Access Center \(SDAC\)](#) directly, and the [Office for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights \(EOCR\)](#) for religious accommodations.

If you have a disability or think you may have a disability, you can learn more about [academic accommodations at Darden](#) and [apply online through SDAC](#). If you have already been approved for accommodations through SDAC, please make sure to send your accommodation letter to me and to Student Affairs – [Erin Colwell \(email\)](#) (EX MBA), [Eva Blau \(email\)](#) (FT MBA), or [Lauren Lopez-Mauer \(email\)](#) (PT MBA) and set up a time for us to meet to develop an implementation plan together.

Also, I want to let you know that I am considered a “Responsible Employee” – which means that in the event you discuss or you share with me information or concerns of discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or sexual misconduct that you or someone else experienced, I will need to share that information with the Title IX office or EOCR. They are trained to address these types of concerns and will offer you information on rights, options and resources. It is up to you how you respond when they contact you, but it is important to me that you understand my role. If you would like to share information with UVA employees who do not have these reporting

obligations, UVA offers confidential resources, such as [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) and the [Women's Center](#), which provides support resources for students of all genders.

Discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, and retaliation is antithetical to UVA's values and is prohibited on our Grounds and in this class. UVA strongly encourages all members of the community to take action, seek support, and report these incidents to the [Title IX office](#) or [Office for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights \(EOCR\)](#).

For specific information about all of this including my role as a Responsible Employee, please review the [full version of EOCR's syllabus statement](#).