

**Course:** DMED 540: Special Topics in Digital Media –  
Market Research for Product Development (3 credits)  
**Term:** Spring 2026  
**Instructor:** Aaron Cruikshank  
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*Acknowledgement of Coast Salish Peoples and Land*

We respectfully acknowledge the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples on whose unceded traditional territories our campus resides.

### Course Description

In today's rapidly evolving digital media landscape, understanding the customer and incorporating their insights is pivotal to creating successful and innovative products. This advanced course is tailored for those aiming for careers in digital media and top-tier technology companies. The resulting skills will enable students to successfully defend product development decisions and support funding asks for development or marketing budgets.

### Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and interpret customers' key demands and desires within the digital media and technology sectors.
- Analyze market trends, competitive landscapes, and emerging technologies to inform product development.
- Apply advanced tools and methodologies to incorporate the voice of the customer in creating compelling products.
- Collaborate with interdisciplinary teams to foster innovation and customer-centric product development.
- Identify and navigate the legal and ethical considerations inherent in customer-focused development.

### Format of the Course

The course will run for 13 weeks with 3-hour weekly class sessions consisting of lectures, in-class activities, and student presentations. Throughout the semester, students may be asked to book meetings with the instructor to check in on their work. Students will work in teams assigned by the instructor and will be expected to work on the projects outside class time.

### Course Schedule

The course will run on Tuesdays from 4:30pm – 7:30pm , January 6 – April 7, 2026.

The following schedule outlines most of the topics covered during the course. *Based on discussions with students and topics covered in parallel courses, some topics may be added or modified during the semester at the instructor's discretion.*

Class	Topic
Week 1 (Tuesday, January 6)	Introduction to Customer Voice & Market Intelligence: Overview of the course, importance of VoC, and market intelligence in product development.
Week 2 (Tuesday, January 13)	Capturing the Voice of the Customer: Methods and tools for capturing and analyzing customer feedback.
Week 3 (Tuesday, January 20)	Analyzing Market Trends & Competitive Landscape: Introduction to market intelligence, competitive analysis, and understanding market dynamics.
Week 4 (Tuesday, January 27)	Application in Industry - Part 1: Understanding the unique demands of digital media users and how to translate insights into design and development.
Week 5 (Tuesday, February 3)	Application in Industry - Part 2: Further exploration of user experience and engagement patterns within the digital media industry.
Week 6 (Tuesday, February 10)	Technology Integration & Tools - Part 1: Introduction to AI and data analytics as tools for capturing market intelligence.
Week 7 (Tuesday, February 24)	Technology Integration & Tools - Part 2: Hands-on exercises and practical applications of technology in product development.
Week 8 (Tuesday, March 3)	Prioritizing features for a Minimum Viable Product or incremental improvements.
Week 9 (Tuesday, March 10)	Crafting a straightforward go-to-market strategy to position and launch those features successfully.
Week 10 (Tuesday, March 17)	How to Implement – Tying market research to strategic outcomes – the Bardach Eightfold Path.
Week 11 (Tuesday, March 24)	Ethical Considerations & Compliance: Discussion on ethical considerations such as privacy, intellectual property rights, and industry regulations.

Week 12 (Tuesday, March 31)	Real-world Case Studies Analysis: Examination of real-world successes and failures in integrating VoC and market intelligence in product development.
Week 13 (Tuesday, April 7)	Review of Final Assignments - Group Presentations and Conclusion of Class

## Course Assignments

*Note: Assignments, due dates, and weighting are subject to change before the start of the semester*

Assignment	Due Date	Weight	Details
<b>Voice of the Customer (Primary Research)</b>	February 3, 2026	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews: Conduct interviews with potential users to gather insights about their needs, preferences, and pain points.</li> <li>Persona Development: Create detailed customer personas representing various user segments.</li> <li>Customer Journey Mapping: Outline the customer journey, highlighting touchpoints, desires, and potential obstacles.</li> </ul>
<b>Market Analysis (Desk Research)</b>	March 3, 2026	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research &amp; Identify: Select a specific target market within the technology or digital media industry.</li> <li>Analyze Competitors: Provide a detailed competitive analysis.</li> <li>Trends &amp; Technology: Analyze current and emerging market trends, including technological advancements.</li> </ul>
<b>Product Strategy</b>	March 24, 2026	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assumes there is already a product concept to build on. If one does not exist, the instructor will provide a case study.</li> <li>Feature Roadmap: Develop a feature development roadmap outlining priority functionalities that align with customer insights.</li> <li>Marketing Strategy: Create a high-level go-to-market strategy considering the competitive landscape and target audience.</li> </ul>

<b>Presentation/ Final Report</b>	April 7, 2026	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report: Compile the findings and strategy into a comprehensive report, using visuals where necessary.</li> <li>• Pitch: Prepare a brief (15-minute) presentation to pitch the product strategy to the class, simulating a pitch to stakeholders or potential investors.</li> </ul>
<b>Participation and Engagement</b>	Week 1 – 13	30%	<i>Contribution to class discussion, participation and group activities.</i>

- **Group Project:** The course will include a major hybrid group assignment that can build off existing group projects. You will have to report as a group, but your work will be broken into discrete sub-assignments that you can work on individually. The instructor will act as your project sponsor to minimize group meetings. Applying the Voice of the Customer (VoC) concepts and market intelligence to create a comprehensive product development strategy for a digital media product, such as a new video game or a technology tool. Each component of the group assignment will ladder up from weekly topics. A template will be provided.

### Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance is expected of students in all their classes (including participation, group work, tutorials, seminars, online etc.). Students who are unavoidably absent due to illness or disability should notify their instructors of their situation.

- Students are expected to attend every class on the schedule (based on their assigned group) and be fully present. While sickness is sometimes inevitable, understand that due to the experiential nature of the material, classes cannot be made up.
- Lateness also informs grading. Classes start punctually every week according to the schedule. Instructions will not be repeated, nor will it be tolerated if a latecomer bothers another student for instructions. If arriving later than half an hour into a class, a student may be marked as absent.
- Due dates: Assignments granted an extension beyond the due date will have no extended comments; assignments handed in late without prior permission will be returned with a grade only, no comments, and 2% per day late, including weekends (i.e., 4% for Saturday and Sunday), deducted from the grade assigned to your paper. Assignments submitted after the assignment has been returned to the rest of the class will not normally be accepted.

<https://www.sfu.ca/students/enrolment-services/policies-and-procedures/academic-concessions.html>

## Grading Profile

A+	95-100	Exemplary expectations
A	90-94	Exceeding expectations
A-	85-89	Meet expectations
B+	80-84	Approaching expectations
B	75-79	
B-	70-74	Below expectations
C	60-69	Far below expectations
F	0 – 59	Fail (Students must retake the course).

A student in a master's or doctoral program must maintain a CGPA of 3.0. Under no circumstances will a student whose CGPA is below 3.0, be awarded a graduate degree.

<https://www.sfu.ca/students/advising-resources/calculators/gpa-calculator.html>

## Laptops & Cell Phones

The use of laptops and cell phones during class is at the discretion of the instructor. *Please respect your classmates and instructors and refrain from text messages, social media, games and videos during class and workshop times.* Please note you should always bring pen and paper to class.

## Written & Spoken English

English is the official language of the school and all communication (written and spoken) is expected to be conducted in English. SFU and the MDM Program provide a wide range of free language support for those who need and it's up to each learner to seek that support.

## Accommodations

The university accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let your instructor know in advance, preferably the first week of class, if you will require any accommodations on these grounds. The Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) will make every effort to assist students with disabilities so that they achieve their educational goals. <https://www.sfu.ca/students/accessible-learning/establishing-accommodations/accommodation.html>

## Academic Integrity: Your Work, Your Success

SFU's Academic Integrity website <http://www.sfu.ca/students/academicintegrity.html> is filled with information on what is meant by academic dishonesty, where you can find resources to

help with your studies and the consequences of cheating.

Each student is responsible for their conduct as it affects the university community. Academic dishonesty, in whatever form, is ultimately destructive of the values of the university.

Furthermore, it is unfair and discouraging to the majority of students who pursue their studies honestly. Scholarly integrity is required of all members of the university.

<http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-01.html>.

### ***Inappropriate use of technology in coursework***

If you are using any technology, including generative AI, to produce or edit content that will be part of your graded work in the course, you must be transparent about the tools that you use. Undeclared use of the tool/technology will be considered a violation of the academic integrity policy. Be aware that any tool used will require you to evaluate the output for accuracies and be responsible for making the appropriate corrections.

### **Graduate Studies Notes**

Important dates and deadlines for graduate students are found here:

[http://www.sfu.ca/dean\\_gradstudies/current/important\\_dates/guidelines.html](http://www.sfu.ca/dean_gradstudies/current/important_dates/guidelines.html).