



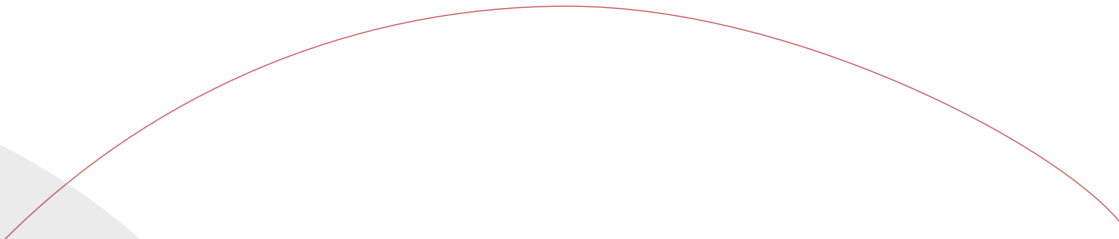
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**Interview with
InterActive student
Sue Freeman, Ontario,
Canada.**

MSc in Marketing



Sue Freeman studied her MSc in Marketing via InterActive from her home in Ontario, Canada. A professional marketer with more than 12 years' experience under her belt, we decided to catch up with Sue as her study programme draws to a close.

Sue offered some fascinating insights into the online study process, and here she shares her thoughts and gives a few practical tips about how to get the most out of your online degree programme.

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Sue Freeman, Ontario, Canada





Sue, thanks for taking the time to share your study experience with us. Could you tell us a little about your background, and about your decision to begin an online master's programme?

Hi! I've been studying with Inter-Active from Ontario, Canada. I work at a national centre for workplace health & safety here, providing online H&S initiatives for the Canadian federal government.

This is the first degree programme which I've studied through distance learning, although I've taken many other forms of non-credit bearing online programmes in the past. In fact, at my workplace here in Ontario we develop on-

line health and safety courses, so I already had a deep knowledge of what eLearning courses are about.

What were your expectations going into the online MSc in Marketing?

Going into this programme I really wanted to leverage the experience of studying with other global participants and being exposed to their opinions, as well as learning what they had to offer in terms of fresh ideas and a new perspective on the various programme case-studies, for example.

Throughout the course I found it fascinating that, whereas I would have one perspective, someone who was from another global vantage point would have a very different point of view. Therefore the advantage of the programme was not only its excellent online delivery- it was also wonderful to read other peoples' feedback and enter a mutually cooperative learning environment.

Could you give us an example of how that interaction worked for you?

Well, if you posted to the online student forum and said ‘Hi everyone, I’ve answered a couple of the questions from last week and here’s what I thought’, subsequently other people would post back and you’d be able to compare and contrast your answers. So it was incredibly useful to tap into that global body of experience; from an African marketer’s perspective to a Canadian marketer’s perspective.

Sometimes the differences in experience and outlook were quite vast, which really affirmed in my mind that we marketers must focus consistently from a global perspective and adjust our approach to the unique target audiences we’re working with. This helps us bear in mind cultural differences, or expectations. All of this really became clear to me throughout the three-year study process.

It sounds like the global nature of the mode of study deeply informed your entire approach to the course, which is something that we believe many students find becomes an integral part of the programme.

Yes, absolutely. I think that having a broad mix of people from all points across the globe lends great value and great insight to the work, because you don’t have a sense of isolation, you have a real sense of studying within a community. This programme made me realise how important it is to open yourself up to other perspectives. One example is, long before you’re handing in your final assignment, you can get up to speed on the topic through reading other students’ work. I regularly found that other students had very compelling arguments about how to approach different audiences, which I hadn’t ever thought of myself.

Also, my fellow students would often post images that they might use in a campaign, asking; did we think it was legitimate? Did we think it would work? And it was very interesting to try and creatively brief one another. I’m the kind of person who benefits from that kind of interaction, and I’m certain that it would many other people also.



“With InterActive I felt there to be tremendous credibility from the relationships you have with various academic institutions, and as I’ve been studying with you I’ve seen those relationships grow, which adds even more credibility.”

As someone who was already working in the field of online education, did you have specific criteria in mind when you were searching for an online education provider?

That was the curious thing. Because I wanted to go after a specific type of master's, I found it challenging to find something in North America which represented the model of; online learning, global community, online access to supervisors and tutors, and so on. When I was searching for a programme in 2011 there were surprisingly few providers.

One of the things that convinced me to go forward with InterActive was the volume of students you had enrolled and the diversity of courses that you had on offer. With InterActive I felt there to be tremendous credibility from the relationships you had with various academic institutions, and as I've been studying with you I've seen those relationships grow, which adds even more credibility. So if I decided to study another master's degree in the future, the positive experience I had with InterActive would be foremost in my mind.



The experience I had was very powerful, it challenged me greatly. I treated it with the same care and consideration as if I were attending a traditional campus programme, spending 15 to 20 hours minimum per week on my studies, sometimes more so.

And did you feel that the level of input from your side was matched in terms of the level of contact you had from your tutors?

Oh yes, in terms of the programme supervisors, they were excellent. For instance, if you saw that they had time set aside you could simply email them and within about a 48 hour time frame, more or less, you're going to hear back, and 9 times out of 10 I would say that was the case.

I also enjoyed the style of presentation employed by the video lecturers, they put a lot of heart and soul into conveying their message and gave a lot of presence to their course material. And I felt that their personality really came through - and that means a lot when you're watching alone, you can sense the tutor's authenticity and feel that they really care about your learning. All of this had a psychological meaning to me as I knew they could understand what I was referring to when I mentioned a certain lecture that I'd seen.



And did you find the syllabus and the course content to have the right level of academic rigour? Were you challenged enough by your curriculum?

For sure, I found it very rigorous, and also very challenging but in a pleasant way in the sense that it gave me what I would call a competitive edge to theories, concepts and applied knowledge which I didn't have before. I feel like I am a better marketer now – that's my overall statement to make!

Before I began this programme I thought of myself as a pretty sharp and competent marketer, but then as you start learning more about social marketing or cause related marketing, you are able to dive deeper into details and spend really good time researching and

asking questions about things you perhaps haven't considered before.

Ironically, having been a professional marketer for 12 years by the time I began the programme, I found myself refreshing my entire knowledge base around all aspects of marketing. The tools of a professional marketer keep changing, so you have to build your discipline towards new theories, concepts and frameworks- and then change when the tools change! It's a very different marketing world for me now compared to when I started with traditional advertising space. It would have been a huge leap for me to try and develop all of these new skills on my own, and so to have a course that supported all that with analytics, with strategic management, and with consumer behavior, was wonderful.

“I travel a lot for business and I need to be able to take my coursework with me, and this way I can hook up to Moodle in my hotel room and do some work. This is what makes InterActive super-flexible.”

How did you feel about the level of social interaction with your fellow students?

It was surprising to me from the first course onward. I had my own notions of what online learning is of course, but when I got into the programme I realised how different things were going to be from my preconceived ideas! I'd say that InterActive are very successful at making the communication process as open and friendly as it can be.

And like many of our students, you were also working full-time throughout the 3-year programme..

I was working full-time throughout the programme, yes. I have a child and I'm also a grandmother now, so just a few other responsibilities! I like the fact that there were no strict time constraints to the programme, it was possible to work at your own pace. I travel a lot for

business and I need to be able to take my coursework with me, and this way I can hook up to Moodle in my hotel room and do some work. This is what makes InterActive super-flexible.

And now that your programme is coming to an end Sue, what's next on your horizon?

Well, my next step will actually be to re-process my research here at the centre where I work, because I think that the areas that I've been studying have applicability to my work here. I just want to keep going with online learning!

I've already been able to apply a lot of what I have learned from the programme, there's no doubt about that. I'd say I've already put to use more than seventy percent of the things I've learned, which is clearly a very high ratio.



To sum up, what final impressions will you take away from online programme, and what advice do you have for other online learners who might be just starting out?

Overall I feel I have been treated with tremendous respect, and seriousness. When my questions needed to be answered, they were answered. I was clearly within a peer supportive environment. If there's a message to take away here, it's that you are in there with your peers and colleagues from your profession, so you need to fully take advantage of their different points of view.

Online learners need to lean on one another and discover what wonderful knowledge and insights already exist. And we need to be brave and consider that working in isolation has some merit, but the more you can get out of sharing with your course supervisor and fellow students, the more this opens up new doors and possibilities.

The most inspiring message I received from my dissertation supervisor, Jeremy Bradley, was 'Please let your family and friends know of your commitment to this programme.' That was a really affirming message! This gave me the confidence to say to my family and friends, 'I'm committed to succeeding in this programme, please support me.' That was a wonderfully supportive and confidence building message to hear.





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