



Olin: TCG

Every student at Olin is required to take AHSE 1500: Foundations of Business and Entrepreneurship (FBE). While it sounds like *Business 101*, it couldn't be further from that. Each semester groups of students, in this class, start their own semester long business with funding from Olin College. Students in the class come up with the ideas and work with Professors John Bourne and Steve Schiffman to make the businesses a success. It's an amazing way to learn basic business concepts. Just like so many things at Olin, FBE incorporates the Do-Learn style of teaching.

In Spring 2006, a group of 10 students formed created the Olin Trading Card Game (Olin TCG). This group created a tradable card game, similar to Magic: The Gathering or Yu-Gi-Oh, based entirely on Olin College. There were cards created for students, professors, locations, and events. This commemorative binder contains every card created during Spring 2006. These cards were sold in decks of 40 for \$6.00 and packs of 10 for \$2.00. Over the course of the semester, Olin TCG made over \$1500 in profit from less than \$250 initial investment. All proceeds were donated to the charity *Partners In Health* which provides healthcare for less fortunate individuals in developing nations.

This is just an example of a typically project at Olin College.

Olin TCG
Final Report

Kevin B., Doug E., Caitlin G., Stephani G.,
George H., Joan L., Kathryn P., Benjamin S.,
Roberto S. Jonathan T.

AHSE1500: Foundations of Business and Entrepreneurship
Professors Bourne and Schiffmann
5/11/2006

Business Description

The Idea

Our original idea was to create a set of trading cards based on students, faculty, locations, and events from Olin's history. These cards appeal to Olin's sense of school pride, provide a commemoration of Olin's history, as well as providing a fun item to collect. Each card is either a student, professor, event, or location relevant to Olin and includes a picture as well as a customizable quote which adds "flavor" to the cards. These cards would have been sold in randomized sets to encourage consumers to purchase more than one set.

After forming our group we discussed the original idea and decided there was more business potential if we created, instead of trading cards, a set of playable, tradable cards. We believed that people would be enticed to purchase more cards if they actually had a purpose outside of just looking pretty. And so, we decided to create a set of tradable cards and we created the appropriately named Olin Trading Card Game—Olin TCG.

Operations

Decks and Pricing

We decided to create two types of sets: Starter Decks and Booster Packs. Each Starter Deck included a distribution of cards, totalling 40, as shown in Appendix A, Table 1. These decks contained enough cards to be able to play the game. Each booster pack contained a random selection of cards including students, events, and time sinks. Each booster pack contained 5 common cards, 3 uncommon card, and one rare card as well as one ultra-common card, as shown in Appendix A, Table 2. Sample cards are shown in Appendix B, Figure 1.

We sold starter decks for \$6 each or 2 decks for \$10. Booster packs were \$2 each or 3 packs for \$5. These prices were considerably cheaper than other Collectible Card Games (CCG), and so we felt that they would encourage customers to purchase decks. Furthermore, because it was only \$4 more to get another starter deck and \$3 more to get 2 more booster packs, we expected that many people would purchase multiple decks at a time.

Near the end of the semester we announced Complete Sets and Class Sets. We offered this option for those individuals who simply wanted to collect all the cards rather than playing the game. We offered these in commemorative binders and sold complete sets for \$60 which included every card we ever made including some additional never before released cards. Individual class sets contained each student from a specific class and sold for \$15. These cards were not tournament playable because we chose to include the type of card on the back of each card.

Marketing

In order to be able to sell decks of cards, we needed to create a market for our product. Our company's marketing was based off of a few simple ideas:

- a) If customers are a part of the design process, they will feel attached to the product and be more likely to purchase the product.
- b) If customers are included in the product, they will be more likely to purchase the product.
- c) If customers find the product attractive, they will be more likely to purchase the product.

At the start of the semester we originally alerted the Olin Community about our project through a survey in which we asked community members if they would be interested in being on a card as well as ideas they had for the game. We received over 100 replies to the survey including many ideas for cards and rules, as well as comments about the game. This survey served many purposes. Not only did it serve as free advertising for the company, but it also allowed us to quickly gauge interest in the community. Furthermore, it allowed community members to feel an attachment to the project, thus encouraging them to purchase cards.

Once we had initial set of cards released, we created a poster which we placed in the dining hall, shown in Appendix B, Figure 2. Since it was in a high-traffic area, the poster helped promote our name to students, faculty, and staff. Furthermore, since we chose to include individual cards on the poster, it demonstrated the product to the community. Also, through periodic e-mails to the community we kept awareness of the company alive.

Tournaments

Throughout the semester we had 2 Olin TCG Tournaments, with 6-8 players participating in each. The winner, runner up, and 3rd place participant received gift certificates for our products. This was not a large loss to our company, because of our significant profit margins. Also, the gift certificate ensures that the tournament participants will get more cards. After all, the cards are free, so why not? This in turn will encourage them to participate in the tournament, and maybe tell their friends about the fun time they had, increasing product and company awareness in the Olin community.

One thing that we should have done would have been to encourage people to get their friends involved in the game. We could have offered monetary incentives, like getting one dollar off a deck, or maybe even gift cards. This would have gotten more people involved, and hopefully more people hooked, increasing our profits.

Production

Near the start of the semester we began looking at how to produce our cards. Initially we ran a search online to find vendors who would print and cut cards for us. The best deal we could find for these cards was about \$0.40 each, which would translate to \$16.00 for a deck of 40 cards. We knew immediately that this was too expensive. Next, we found a vendor which offered "print your own cards" card stock which they claimed would work with laser printers. We immediately ordered 40 pages of this paper and tested it out, only to find that it was false advertising, because the paper did not print on our laser printers. After contacting the company which supplied the paper and receiving conflicting and unhelpful responses, we decided to simply write the paper off as an expense.

As a last resort, we went to an office supply store and bought the thickest paper they sold that was compatible with our laser printers. This ended up being our ultimate solution. However, this presented two new problems. The first is that we did not have pre-perforated cards, so we had to cut all the cards out by hand, a very labor-intensive process. And the second is that the paper is thinner than the card stock that is typically used for trading card games, which meant we had to find a way of making the cards thicker. After discussing a number of options, involving glue and other unsatisfactory ideas, we settled on buying cheap plastic card protectors, which would both protect the card from dirt and sweat, and add thickness, providing the stiffness that is expected of a good trading card.

After deciding on how to print and cut our cards, we needed to determine how we would package the decks. We wanted something that would be cheap, easy to produce, and actually fit the number of cards we were going to include. Our other criteria was a packaging solution that would appear to the Olin engineering student. Our immediate, unanimous response was: DUCT TAPE! We thought making a duct tape card box would not only be cheap but make the product more attractive. In the end, however, we realized this would be time consuming as well as create other problems—like cards sticking to the tape, and so we continued to search for better solutions. On a whim we decided to look into the cost for antistatic bags like Olin mails many of its brochures in. We realized that they were quite cheap and would fit decks of cards well. It was later discovered that we could actually seal the antistatic bags by running the hot tip of a soldering iron across the top of the bag. The end result was a professional looking, extremely geeky package, which is exactly what we were looking for.

Financials

Expenses

Expenses for Products

With our method of producing cards and the size of decks to sell in place, we looked at the cost of each deck. Each deck has expenses for printing, cardstock, card protectors, and antistatic bags. Starter decks cost \$1.10 to produce and booster packs, \$0.29. The itemized costs for starter decks and booster packs are shown in Appendix C, Tables 3 and 4.

Complete Sets and Class Sets required us to pay for binders, and sheet protectors to use in addition to the cardstock and printing. Complete Sets cost us \$12.29 to produce, as shown in Appendix C, Table 9. Each Class Set had a different number of cards, and so they each cost a different amount to produce. Costs are shown in Appendix C, Tables 5-8.

Total Expenses

Throughout the semester, we incurred expenses totalling \$1011.20. These expenses are shown in the pie chart in Appendix D, Figure 3. Note that almost half our expenses were due to printing costs, followed the sheet protectors we purchased for our complete sets. We ended up paying Olin's IT department a total of \$425 for the printing throughout the semester.

Income

Net Profit

Over the course of the semester, we sold 133 starter decks, 82 booster packs, 23 complete sets, 10 class sets and about 300 loose cards for a total revenue of \$2656.50, including tax. After subtracting our expenses from our revenue, we had a Net Income Before Taxes of \$1645.30, as shown in Appendix E, Table 10. After paying our taxes of \$126.50 we ended up with a Net Income After Taxes of \$1518.80. Since we asked for an original line of credit of \$250, this means we made more than 600% return on our investment.

Analysis of Profit

Because we were not accounting for labor, we had very high profit margins on our products, ranging from 70% to 85%. These are shown, by product, in Appendix D, Figure 4. Our highest profit margins were on our Booster packs, and our lowest on the Class of 2009 Class Set. While most people thought our Complete Set was very expensive, it turns out that this actually had a fairly low profit margin.

Despite the highest profit margin being on our booster packs our highest gross profit came from our Complete Sets, as shown in Appendix D, Figure 5. Despite the fact that the profit margin was not as high on the Complete Sets, the fact that each set we sold gave us almost \$50 in profit caused the Complete Sets to make up almost 2/3 of our profit. This was followed up by our starter decks, bringing just over one quarter of our profit. Had we decided to not sell complete sets, our overall profit would have been considerably lower.

Individual Contributions

Kevin Bretney

Assembly, Card Design, Sales

I specifically joined the Olin Trading Card Group since it showed the most promise of a successful venture. Once I joined this group I knew I was in the correct place. I was one of the sub-group who helped to come up with the basic game-play and card design. I then worked on creating the cards, finding and adding pictures, coming up with powers and flavor text for the first set of cards we released. Once this first set was released I continued to work with adding pictures and powers to the cards, but my role in this died down over the course of the project. Instead I found my niche sealing packs. I wielded the mighty power of the multi-purpose soldering iron and sealed the packs with ruthless efficiency. I also worked on cutting the cards out and putting them in card protectors and selling.

Doug Ellwanger

Assembly, Card Design, Game Rules, Tournament Staff

My contributions fit into a few disparate categories. I had a very limited role in IT because my desktop computer was used as a somewhat secure file server. Once it was set up, however, I didn't have to do anything else with it. I helped in the initial rules creation, which was a large time sink at the beginning of the semester. Once the rules were finalized, all that was left was clarifications, especially at the tournaments. I also made contributions in card design of most of the sets, since it's a lot easier to create cards if you understand the rules. Finally, I helped in the assembly of sets.

Caitlin Greeley

Accounting, Assembly, Sales

I was in charge of all the finances. I counted up all the money and had to figure how much of our supplies we used based on how much of your product sold. As far as supplies, I would reimburse people for any of the supplies they bought, which was usually over the internet. I drove and got most of the supplies that we got from stores, namely all the paper. When we gave our presentations in class every two weeks I would make the transaction worksheet along with all the other statements.

I also helped out with some of the more general stuff. I cut a lot of cards and put them in card protectors. Sometimes I sold cards at lunch. Since getting people to actually approve their cards was very difficult when we made the freshman class I went around, found a lot of the people and had them approve their card in person.

Stephani Gulbrandsen

Assembly, Information Gathering, Sales

I helped out where I could by doing a lot of odd-jobs. In the beginning I walked around with Kevin and Roberto in East Hall talking to students. We wanted to get the students' approval for making their card. This helped to publicize our trading card game that we were preparing to create. I spent a few evenings talking to both senior students and junior students to gather information. This information was used to make cards for the senior and junior classes, helping to provide ideas for abilities and flavor text. Once decks were being made, I began selling them on Wednesdays during lunch. I sold for most Wednesdays, but there were a couple of days where I had other commitments.

As the semester began to finish up I started putting in a lot of time cutting cards and placing them in card protectors for the complete sets we were making to sell. I also helped to finish up the professor cards we needed with Kevin. I tried my best to fill in and do the work that was needed to be done.

George Harris

Assembly, Graphic Design, Sales

My contribution to Olin: TCG was in the form of graphic design. The largest part of this was the design of the playing cards themselves, including the complete set versions of the cards. I also designed most of our promotional materials, including the large poster used for advertising in the dining hall. My most recent contribution was the design of the binders used for packaging the complete and class sets.

Joan Liu

Assembly, Picture Gathering, Sales

Since I do not know too much about trading card games, I helped with non-game related activities. I would help find pictures for the cards. I would help a lot with cutting and stuffing cards into card protectors. Occasionally, I would help sell for about half an hour at lunch. At mini-expo, George and I did a presentation of FBE and the card game. While this did not sell a lot of our cards to the candidates, many Olin students found out about our game. In addition to this, I thought of some marketing strategies, though some of them were not as successful as we had wished. In the last few weeks, there were many cards to cut and stuff into page protectors and then into binders so instead of making cards to put into the packs, I cut the cards to put them into complete sets.

Kathryn Peters

Assembly, Card Design

In the Olin TCG, I helped with card design, recruited professors for the cards, presented to candidates during the Mini-Expo, helped sell, cut out cards and bagged them for final decks, and prepared the sophomore class's cards. I got initial permission forms from 4 professors and got final permissions from 3. When presenting at Mini-Expo we introduced the candidates to the Foundations of Entrepreneurship class, one of the things that makes Olin unique, and sold several decks to candidates and their parents. I did not do all of the work on the sophomores' cards, but I sent out the initial plea for information and permission and compiled all of the information they provided me with.

Benjamin Salinas

Assembly, Card Design, Information Gathering, Management, Marketing, Sales

At the start of the semester I originally came up with the idea for Olin Trading Cards, and after discussing the idea with Kevin Sihlanick and Herbert Chang, we also came up with the idea of a tradable card game that eventually became Olin TCG. In the first few weeks I worked some on the concept behind the game (which eventually became the rules) and worked heavily on the first set of professors and students. At the same time other group members worked on events, time sinks, and locations. It turned out that these 25 original cards were just about the only ones that I did not design at least in part.

Throughout the semester I was in charge of delegating jobs and running meetings. I also designed most of the cards (or at least designed part of most of the cards) and talked with upperclassmen about their classmates to help design cards. I printed every card that we made in addition to cutting cards as well and selling at least 1 day every week. I also was the main port of communication between our company and the outside world. I communicated with almost every student and professor who is on a card for approval of their card (and changes) and drafted most of the e-mails we sent out to the community. In addition, I put together and gave most of the presentations in class and helped run both tournaments. During the semester, I made most of the executive decisions and paid for most products with my credit card, before being reimbursed. Finally, I worked with Jon to compile this report. Essentially, I did substantial work on every aspect of the project excluding the finances, and took a lead role in many of them.

Roberto Santana

Assembly, Sales, Tournament Coordinator

During the start-up phase of the business I was heavily involved in defining the game structure. I helped create many of the rules of the game as well as the types of cards that would exist and their abilities. I also spent quite a bit of time play testing the initial cards to make sure we had created a fair game. I was also part of the group that went door to door through east hall asking each person's permission to create their card and get people interested in the game. Once the game worked and we had sold cards my main duties changed to being in charge of tournaments. While I still produced cards at our manufacturing meetings and sold occasionally at lunch, I was charged with organizing, advertising, and running tournaments.

Jonathan Tse

Card Design, Information Gathering, Management, Picture Gathering, Game Rules

I helped Ben with the management-related activities, like task delegation and strategic decisions, as well as following up on task delegation to ensure that things got done. Also, early in the semester, right after the teams were formed, I suggested that the team meet at a fixed weekly meeting, which have been very successful.

Another one of my duties was the group webmaster. I started the section on ahse1500.org and maintained it. Near the end of the semester, my updates grew less frequent, but I plan to get the most recent info on there very soon.

I also tapped other outside of class resources, like my OlinWorks experience, to get us some pictures for the cards. I talked to seniors to gather information for cards, as well as using my personal knowledge of the sophomore class to design cards.

In the early phase of the business, Doug and I sat down with a few other experienced card gamers from the team and did some play testing, hammering out rules for the game as we went. Throughout the design process, I sat down with Ben and went through, card by card, to make sure that they were within the rules, and that they were play balanced as well as possible. Additionally, I helped design a lot of the sophomores, and got in contact with my senior friends to help design the senior cards.

Finally, Ben and I wrote this report, minus the individual contributions.

Final Considerations

Labor Costs

In the end, our business ended up being very successful, as you can see from our financial statements in Appendix E. Even though our profit margins were so high, we didn't take into account our labor costs, which would dramatically reduce these margins. A conservative estimate for time spent on producing a set of cards is about 80 man-hours per class. This estimate would include discussing cards with students, getting approval, designing cards, printing cards, cutting cards, and assembling decks as well as selling the decks. With four classes released, this translates to at least 320 hours, which assuming we pay minimum wage of \$6.75 would be an additional \$2160 of expenses. This tells us that with such a small market it would have been virtually impossible for us to make a profit if we paid for labor. It is also important to note that while some of the work was menial labor, much of it would have demanded a wage considerably higher than \$6.75 per hour (such as graphic design, card design, public relations, etc.).

Influence

Olin TCG has definitely influenced Olin in many ways throughout the last semester. Most notably was the Software Design project, *Olin TCG**2*, which created a computer game version of Olin TCG. However, more importantly, Olin TCG served nobler causes. Olin TCG caused

students to take a step back and reflect on Olin as a whole. At no other school could a game like this be as personal as it is at Olin, for it is only at a school as small and tight as Olin that you could pick up a card of a student and know who they are. Olin TCG helped promote Olin's sense of community, while it also allowed students to learn more about their classmates. Most importantly it gave Olin students a chance to take a break from their stressful life and think some about Olin.

The Future

Many of the members of Olin TCG are interested in continuing to produce cards for the future classes as well as try to complete as many of the current students as possible. Currently we are missing about 20 members of the class of 2008 and 15 members of the class of 2007. In addition we hope to create a card for every member of the class of 2010 and to continue creating new events, locations and hope to introduce staff members. It is unclear at this point whether we will keep the profits made from selling cards or donate them to a charity (or simply reinvest them) but we hope to open the project up to more interested students.

Appendix A

Card Type	Number
Common Students	7
Uncommon Students	4
Common Professors	4
Uncommon Professors	2
Locations	4
Common Events & Time Sinks	10
Uncommon Events & Time Sinks	6
Rare	2
Ultra-Common	1

Table 1: Card Distributions for Starter Decks

Card Type	Number
Common	5
Uncommon	3
Rare	1
Ultra-Common	1

Table 2: Card Distributions for Booster Packs

Appendix B



Figure 1: Sample Olin TCG Cards



Figure 2: Poster printed and hung in Dining Hall

Appendix C

Item	Cost
Printing	\$0.67
Card Protectors	\$0.22
Cardstock	\$0.18
Antistatic Bags	\$0.03
Total	\$1.10
Selling Price	\$6.00

Table 3: Cost of Production for Starter Decks

Item	Cost
Printing	\$0.17
Card Protectors	\$0.05
Cardstock	\$0.04
Antistatic Bags	\$0.03
Total	\$0.29
Selling Price	\$2.00

Table 4: Costs of Production for Booster Pack

Item	Cost
Printing	\$0.84
Sheet Protectors	\$0.51
Cardstock	\$0.22
Binder	\$2.00
Total	\$3.57
Selling Price	\$15.00

Table 5: Cost of Production for Class of 2006 Sets

Item	Cost
Printing	\$0.93
Sheet Protectors	\$0.60
Cardstock	\$0.24
Binder	\$2.00
Total	\$3.77
Selling Price	\$15.00

Table 6: Cost of Production for Class of 2007 Sets

Item	Cost
Printing	\$0.78
Sheet Protectors	~\$0.51
Cardstock	\$0.20
Binder	\$2.00
Total	\$3.49
Selling Price	\$15.00

Table 7: Cost of Production for Class of 2008 Sets

Item	Cost
Printing	\$1.30
Sheet Protectors	\$0.77
Cardstock	\$0.34
Binder	\$2.00
Total	\$4.41
Selling Price	\$15.00

Table 8: Cost of Production for Class of 2009 Sets

Item	Cost
Printing	\$5.59
Sheet Protectors	\$3.23
Cardstock	\$1.47
Binder	\$2.00
Total	\$12.29
Selling Price	\$60.00

Table 9: Cost of Production for Complete Sets

Appendix D

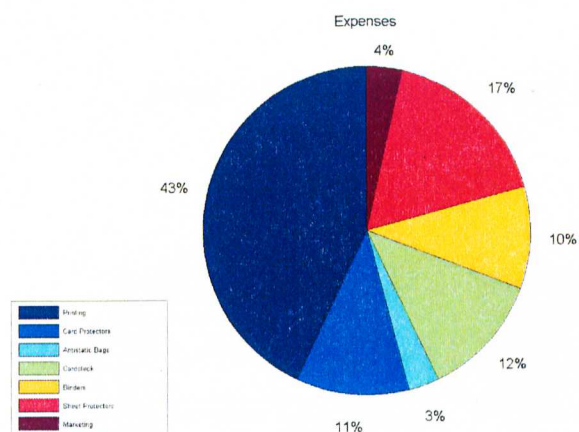


Figure 3: Expenses by Type of Expense

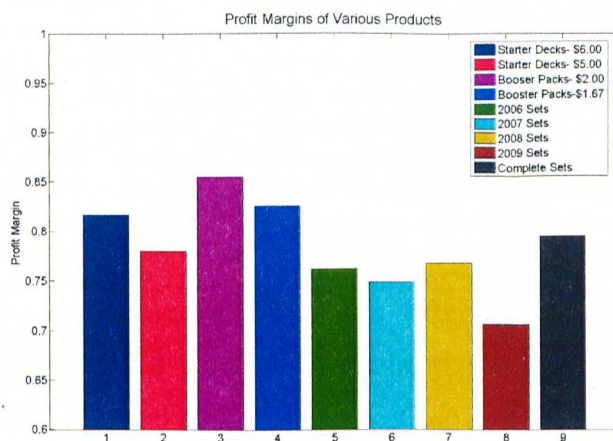


Figure 4: Profit Margins by Product

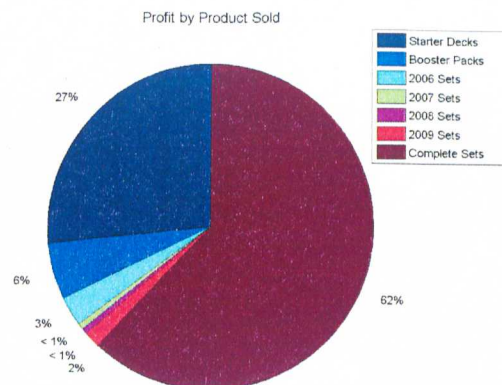


Figure 5: Profit Earned by Product

Appendix E

Revenue	\$2656.50
Expenses	\$1011.20
Net Income Before Taxes	\$1645.30
Taxes	\$126.50
Net Income After Taxes	\$1518.80

Table 10: Income Statement Ending May 11, 2006

Assets		Liabilities	
Funds		Accounts Payable	
Cash	\$678.80	N/P to Ben	\$0.00
Credit Card	\$60.00	N/P to Joan	\$0.00
Check	\$695.00	N/P to Caity	\$0.00
Accounts Receivable	\$85.00	N/P to Olin	\$0.00
Supplies	\$47.20	Total Liabilities	\$0.00
Marketing	\$35.00	Equity	
		Retained Earnings	\$1,601.00
		Total Equity	\$1,601.00
Total Assets	\$1,601.00	Total Liabilities & Equity	\$1,601.00

Table 11: Balance Sheet