

Marketing of Educational Services: A New Strategy for Customer Satisfaction

Dr. D. Maria Antony Raj, Dr. M. Raguraman, Prof. R. Veerappan

SDB, Controller of Examinations, Vice Principal, Asst. Prof., in Commerce, Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur

Asst Prof., Dept of Commerce, Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur

,Asst Prof., Dept of Business Administration, Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur

Abstract : Students and the parents are aware that the cost of education has been on the rise irrespective of mushroom growth of educational institutions. Already there is cutthroat competition among various private educational institutions. This competition will become more aggressive if the foreign universities are allowed to open their study centres in India. Albeit quality and employability are the main concerns of responsible institutions, money minting institutions which aim high rate of return lure and divert the parents and the students through attractive ads, by bypassing customer satisfaction. However, the success of these institutions will be possible only in the short run. Under these circumstances, building customer loyalty through customer satisfaction has become a challenging one. A well designed educational marketing strategy is the need of the hour for ensuring success and survival in the market. There are some key considerations-i.e., Education should be Approachable, Applicable, Adaptable and Appraisable. These 4A's should be the 'mantra' of any educational institution for ensuring success in the market. Right communication strategy at the right time can ensure easy approachability. Introduction of relevant and fresh curricula can guarantee the employability of a student. Any system that is introduced should be adaptable. Otherwise, there will be total dilution and the entire plan of the organisation will be collapsed. After adapting the scheme, it should be evaluated properly to know the results and identify the changes required for further improvement. This paper is an attempt to identify the strategy to be applied by the educational institutions in marketing their services in order to ensure their success and survival.

Key Words: Adaptable, Applicable, Appraisable, Approachable , Appraisable, Customer Satisfaction

Introduction

In the olden days existence of '*Guru-Sishya Parampara*' in Indian educational system

was prevailing. Teachers were called as 'Guru' and student were known as 'Sishya'. The *sishya* used to stay at a 'toll' or 'Ashram' of 'Gurukul' which now have been transformed to 'Residential Campus', or Hostel. Educational service at that time was a 'Social Service' and institutions did not have any motive of profit maximization. The social service has recently being shifted to 'Commercial Service'. Hardly there was any competition to admit maximum number of students in their institutions. With Globalization, Privatization and Liberalization since 1991, the educational sector is flooded with large number of private and foreign players, specially the professional management institutions. Competition among them (government, private and foreign owned institutions), population explosion, government initiatives have enforced the marketing concept in this sector which was not prevailing in the olden era

Education in its broadest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. It is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another through institution.

Mantra's of Educational Services

- Approachable
- Applicable
- Adaptable and
- Appraisable.

Need for Marketing Educational Services

- Need to market their services has not really been felt by the educational sector
- Large number of institutions for specialized fields have been set up in the recent years for fields like management and computer education

Education as a Service

Services are those separately identifiable, essentially intangible activities, which provide want satisfaction and are not necessarily tied to the sale of the product another service. Education is a service which is geared primarily to the consumer market/

Characteristics of Educational Services

1. Intangibility

Education is an intangible dominant service – Impossible to touch, see or feel

2. Perishability

- Production and consumption are simultaneous activities
- No inventories can be made up eg. A lecture scheduled cannot be stored

3. Inseparability

There is a need for the service provider to be present when the service is to be performed and consumed

4. Others

- High fixed cost, Low variable cost
- Specialized and need based
- Competition
- Customer limitations
- Heterogeneity

Marketing Mix of Educational Services

1. Product

In case of educational services, the product means the students and the services means the intangible offers (like the course itself, the services rendered by the faculty etc.) made by the educational institutions. Here, services make the product of an institute. Through the products and services the educational institutions promotes their organization and develop the brand value in the competitive market

2. Price / Fees

The price is the amount a student pays for the services availed by him or her. It is determined by a number of factors including competition, service quality, placement, reputation of the institution, private or public ownership, infrastructure, facilities provided, location of the institute, mode of education, brand name of the educational institution etc. Here, price reflects the quality of services provided to the students. Hence, it can be used as marketing tool by the institutions.

3. Place

Place represents the location where an educational institute is established. It is often referred to as the service centre. If the institute is located at a Metro city, it will provide much more competitive edge, than if it is located in rural place. So, place is also a vital promotional tool for them.

4. Promotion

Promotion represents all of the communications that a service provider uses in the marketplace. Promotion has a few distinct elements such as advertising, public relations, word of mouth, point of sale, publicity, direct & web marketing, etc. Educational institute emphasizes mainly on two components of promotion viz. advertising and web-based marketing, rather than all. As far as promotion tool is concerned, positive word-of-mouth communication has been found the best tool for them.

5. People

Here, the people mean teaching fraternity and non-teaching community directly and indirectly associated with the services rendered to the students. Satisfaction and retention of the students solely depends on the way the teachers are in a position to deliver their best services to them. Teachers are not treated as '*guru*', rather they are known as *facilitators / services providers*. Growth and existence of an educational institute, particularly the professional educational organization depends on the competency, effectiveness, efficiency, sincerity, dedication and devotion of the teaching community of the institute. People proved as the most vibrant component of educational services marketing mix.

6. Process

The procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities which lead to an exchange of value are called the process. The way

service providers render services to the students, plays a pivotal role in gaining the competitive advantages. If the service process is hassle free, simple, understandable, student friendly and technology based, it will definitely make the institution with difference. Examples might include the way a student is treated by a staff member and rendered service by a teacher, or the length of time a student has to wait to get services from them.

7. Physical Evidence

It is the direct sensory experience of a service that allows a student to measure whether he or she has received adequate facilities by the educational institution. Examples might include the physical environment in which service is delivered, the physical facilities provided and the infrastructure created by the organization for them. It might include state-of-art technology, building, total ambience, parking facility, play ground, gymnasium, swimming pool, indoor stadium, transportation facility, hostel, AC class room facility, computer laboratory, canteen, library, number of books and journals, different modern teaching aid etc. All of these play a crucial role in marketing of educational institute.

Gap Analysis of Educational Service

Provider Gap 1:

Educational institutions do not know the expectations of the students.

Provider Gap 2:

Institutions are not having the desired service designs and standards to meet the requirements of the students.

Provider Gap 3:

Educational institutions are not delivering service standards as required to deliver.

Provider Gap 4:

They are not matching performance they are supposed to show and promises communicated to the students.

Provider Gap 5

There are lot of differences between expectations of the students and their perceptions, which is known as Customer Gap

Five Pillars of Educational Services

- Make it Easy
- Make it Relevant
- Make it Fresh
- Manage It
- Measure It

1. Make It Easy:

The centerpiece of any successful program is an interactive website designed specifically for the targeted audience the company is seeking to reach. The website's sophistication mirrors the organization's training and communications needs and budget. But regardless of those factors, the site must have the appearance and usability of polished consumer websites that users are accustomed to visiting. It must cater to the needs of time-starved professionals to find and process information quickly.

2. Make It Relevant:

A successful educational marketing solution also must include topics and formats that are

customer-driven, covering not just how to use specific products, but also related topics that help customers achieve their fundamental goals and objectives that are driving them to consider your products and services. Savvy customers expect more to win their trust. For example, imagine that your company manufactures and sells high quality, ultra-efficient windows. To build an intimate customer relationship and firmly establish your brand, you would want to offer more than product specifications and energy efficiency data—those elements are a given. You might want to offer a learning guide educating homeowners on how they can conduct an energy efficiency audit of their home. You might want to provide details on federal income tax incentives, and case examples of the best ways to maximize your credit. Or you might want to develop a design simulator that lets homeowners and professional designers envision what your products might look like and what efficiencies they might achieve with them.

3. Make it Fresh:

People tend to lose interest in web sites that don't provide a compelling reason for them to return. Companies need to post fresh educational content on a regular basis just as they do with other types of content, and be bold about retiring content that users rate lower or don't access frequently. Customers should be invited to subscribe to content alerts by e-mail

4. Manage It

Behind the scenes, an effective educational marketing website needs to capture critical customer information, such as what content your

customers are viewing, how content preferences differ by type of learner, where and why customers might “bail” from your site. After capturing this type of usage data, you can then strategize new content and site improvements. More importantly, you can provide critical data regarding customer and prospect preferences to your colleagues in product development, sales and marketing functions. Users see a marketing-quality site, but the powerful database driving it feeds invaluable data customer information systems. It can also automate the way content is managed, providing alerts for content that needs to be updated or retired.

5. Measure It

Scorecards and dashboards make it easy for decision makers to see the impact of educational marketing. As noted above, an educational marketing website can provide rich data that can provide keen insights to your customers' and prospects' interests and behaviors. Website analytics and content consumption data enable marketers to see the impact of customer education on product sales and gain macro-level information to focus marketing campaigns.

Conclusion

For the professional educational institutes suitable placement for students after completion of the course should be the first and foremost consideration. Later on, placement can be used as a marketing tool for the institution. Whenever loopholes are identified, institute should act very quickly to resolve it. Student Relationship Management (SRM) must be maintained systematically for the long run benefit of the institution. Alumni are the most important

stakeholder and the greatest contributor for the organization. Fair treatment to all the present and former students is very necessary because of the fact that they act like non-paid brand ambassadors of the institute. Honest student appraisal can make an institute with difference. During appraisal process, halo effect, leniency effect, stringent effect, recency effect, primacy effect, central tendency effect, stereotyping, etc. ought to be avoided. During service delivery time quality and customization should be the 'mantra' to the service provider. Market driven services must be offered to the students. Service providers ought to welcome and encourage feedback from the students to dissolve all the grievances among them.

Students are the backbone of an educational institute as well as a nation. A country, society and culture become rich when the educational system is well-established. Educational institutes needs to adopt the 'student centric approaches' to remain unbeaten in the turbulent market. To promote the services of professional institutes, 'services marketing triangle' approaches must be adopted. To sale the products i.e. students of the educational institute in the competitive market, institutes should cultivate 'professionalism' and inculcate the same among their students. They must ensure quality output from their institutions. Positive 'word-of-mouth' can be ascertained to create awareness among the target segment. Educational services organizations ought to focus on building stronger network with the existing and prospective employers in the country and abroad. In this context 'Industry-Academia Interface' can be

built. Long term relationship must be built with the employees and employers. 'Student Relationship Management' (SRM) i.e. relationship with the alumni, can be very useful tool for promoting the present students and the institution as a whole.

REFERENCES

- All India Management Association (2009), *MAT Bulletin*, 3rd May.
- Baines, Fill Chris and Page (2009), *Marketing*, Oxford University Press, First Indian Edition, New Delhi.
- Baran, Galka, and Strunk (2008), *Customer Relationship Management*, Cengage Learning, India Edition, New Delhi.
- Kumar and Meenakshi (2009), *Marketing Management*, Vikash Publishing House Limited, New Delhi.

Websites

- <http://www.edujobing.com/world-development-report-2004>
- https://www.oppapers.com/login.php?save_page=/essays/Services-Marketing-Mix
- http://www.reportbuyer.com/public_sector/education/education_services_market