Using of Marketing Communication for Distance Education Institutions

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INTRODUCTION

Because of increased competition for scarce resources, marketing has become an important activity of many nonprofit organizations. Higher education institutions, as one of these nonprofit organizations, provide us with excellent examples of this trend (Hayes, 1991). The marketing of higher education has received a tremendous amount of emphasis and attention.

Distance education (DE) has become an accepted form of education and has been gaining widespread popularity in recent years. Marketing concept has been gaining importance in distance education sector throughout the world. The factors responsible for this are self-support policies, increasing competitiveness in the marketplace, rising customer expectations, widening access to education etc (Gupta,?). More than 70 countries are offering educational programmes through distance education all over the world today (Sudalaimuthu, http://www.ignou.ac.in/Theme-1/S.%20Sudalaimuthu.htm Visited 3rd March, 2005,) Because of flexibility, convenience and opportunity, distance education is becoming so popular, profitable and vital. By 2005, % 90 American universities will offer at least one course online. Currently about 3 million Americans are distance education students (Gonzales, 2002).

In this paper, I will discuss the following questions: What is the brief history and changing environment of distance education? Which marketing communication tools are used in DE institutions? What benefits does marketing communications provide to DE institutions?

BRIEF HISTORY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance education began as a correspondence course in the 1800's. Between the years of 1950 and 1960, it serviced as video conferencing. From 1950 to 1980, teleconferencing was used. Since 1990 to present day, web-based instruction have been using in distance education. Distance education has continuously evolved as technology has improved. From the early 1800's to present day, educators have utilized this method of instruction to reach those unable to interact face to face due to various circumstances.

Britain's Open University is the largest and most innovative educational organization in the world. It brought a new vision of independence for distance education as distinct from traditional education. It is a leader in the large-scale application of technology to facilitate distance learning. Open University brought the needed respect and confidence to the correspondence program around the world. The success of Britain's Open University was the major reason for the development of open universities in other countries, such as America and Japan. In India, at present 72 universities are offering distance education programmes, catering more than 7 lakhs students at present (Sudalaimuthu, visited 3rd March, 2005, http://www.ignou.ac.in/Theme-1/S.%20Sudalaimuthu.htm).

New York State's Empire State College (NYSES) commenced operation in 1971 is the first United States Open University. One of the main purposes of the NYSES was to make higher education degrees more accessible to learners unable to attend traditional programs, campus-based courses. The program in NYSES modified the concept of academic credits and

provided a greater flexibility regarding degree requirements and time limitations than was characteristic of tradition-based degree programs (Nasseh, 1997).

Within the university setting, some institutions offer only distance education, while others provide both distance and conventional education. Those that offer only distance learning is referred to as "open universities," and most are modeled after the United Kingdom's Open University. Mega-universities are large open universities, each of which enrolls more than 100,000 students per year; combined enrollment is some 2.8 million.

According to Daniel (1997), there are 11 mega-universities in the world today and their enrolment figures clearly show they have provided increased access to higher education.

Table: 1
Mega-Universities of the World.

Country	Name of institution	Established	Students in degree programs 1	Graduates per year
China	China TV University System	1979	530,000	101,000
France	Centre national d'enseignement à distance	1939	184,614	28,000
India	Indira Gandhi National Open University	1985	242,000	9,250
Indonesia	Universitas Terbuka	1984	353,000	28,000
Iran	Payame Noor University	1987	117,000	7,563
Korea	Korea National Open University	1982	210,578	11,000
South Africa	University of South Africa	1873	130,000	10,000
Spain	Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia	1972	110,000	2,753
Thailand	Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University	1978	216,800	12,583
Turkey	Anadolu University	1982	577,804	26,321
United Kingdom	Open University	1969	157,450	18,359
[1] Enrollment figures vary by year between 1994 and 1996.				

Here is another list of all the mega-universities in the world. (Visited 3rd, March, 2005, http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/m/me/mega_university.htm)

- Allama Iqbal University, Pakistan
- Anadolu University, Turkey,

- **Athabasca University, Athabacsa, Canada**
- **Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh**
- **China Central Radio and TV University,**
- **City College of San Francisco, United States**
- **Fern University, (FernUniversität), Germany,**
- **Indira Gandhi National Open University, India**
- **Indonesian Open Learning University (Universitas Terbuka), Indonesia**
- **Instituto Tecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Mexico**
- **Korea National Open University, South Korea**
- **National Distance Learning Center (Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance - CNED), France**
- **National Distance Learning University**
  (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia — UNED, Spain
- **Open University, United Kingdom**
- **Payame Noor University, Iran**
- **Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand**
- **Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Mexico**
- **University of Maryland University College, United States**
- **University of Phoenix, United States**
- **University of South Africa, South Africa.**

CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

In the last 20 years, with the advancement in technology, independent study has become more accessible for distance education students. Modern communication technologies can easily link educational institutions to homes, work-sites, and community centers, and made adult education and lifelong learning matters of national policy (Nasseh, 1997) Distance education is used in a variety of settings and for a broad range of purposes. Universities use it to increase the number of students who have access to higher education; companies use it to upgrade their workers' skills and keep them abreast of rapidly advancing technologies; individuals use it for their own professional development and to enhance their career opportunities; governments use it to provide on-the-job training to teachers or other workers, to enhance the quality of traditional primary and secondary schooling, and to deliver instruction to remote rural areas that might not otherwise be served (Potashnik& Capper, 1998)

However, accompanying the growth in Internet usage today's distance education focus has dramatically shifted toward network-based technologies (in general) and Internet-based delivery (more specifically). Today, the Internet is being used more than other continuing education delivery strategies, such as Interactive Television (ITV), correspondence, and live-remote location combinations. Not only is online learning more common now, but also it increases 40% annually. One reason for the growth is the fact that digital media are transferable, storable, and widely accessible (Howel, Williams, Lindsay, 2000).

According to Howel, Williams, Lindsay, (2000), 32 trends affect distance education. These trends are divided by 6 categories. These are student / enrollment trends, faculty trends, academic trends, technology trends, economic trends, distance learning trends. When we look at distance learning trends, we can see that more courses, degrees, and universities are becoming available through distance-education programs, the internet is becoming dominant among other distance-education media, the distinction between distance and local education is disappearing, the need for effective course-management systems and web services is growing, there is an increasing need for learning and teaching strategies that exploit the capabilities of technology. All of these changes cause for competition among distance education institutions. New computer and telecommunications technologies offer the

possibility of global access to education. In theory, these new technologies should allow potential learners to access any course they want, at any time, from anywhere in the world.

Perhaps most important of all, through widening choice, the new interactive technologies could empower individual learners on a global basis by making education more focused on their needs rather than those of the local providers of education (Bates and Gpe, 1997).

MARKETING OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

American Marketing Association states that marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives (Berkowitz, Kerin, Hartley and Rudelius, 1997). To serve both buyers and sellers, marketing seeks to discover the needs and wants of prospective customers and to satisfy them. Marketing is design to produce four principal benefits:

1. Greater success is fulfilling the institution's missions.
2. Improved satisfaction of the institution's public.
3. Improved attraction of marketing resources
4. Improved efficiency in marketing activities

Marketing provides tools for comparing what the institution is actually doing with its stated mission and goals. Marketing helps identify problems and plan response that will help the institution fulfill its mission. Marketing, in stressing the importance of measuring and satisfying consumer needs, tends to produce an improved level of client services and satisfaction. It provides a disciplined approach to improving the attraction of the students, employees, volunteers, donations, and grants' needed resources. Marketing emphasizes the rational management and coordination of program development, pricing, communications, and distribution (Kotler& Fox, 1985).

In recent years marketing concept has been gaining importance in all sectors of service throughout the world. The responsible factors for this are self-support policies, increasing competitiveness in the marketplace, rising customer expectations, widening access to information etc. In order to survive in such an environment DE institutions need to evaluate their activities with the external environment, get in touch with the users' need, and integrate this analysis into every day working of the DE organization - in short to adopt the marketing concept (Gupta, visited 1st February, 2005, http://www.ignou.ac.in/Theme-1/Dinesh%20K.%20Gupta.htm).

Educational institutions face marketing problems. Many face changing student needs and societal expectations, increasing competitions for scarce client and funding resources, and unlimited financial pressures. One result is that educators are often forced to take a hard look at marketing to see what this discipline might offer to keep their institutions viable and relevant. At the same time, many educators are approaching marketing with caution. Although educational administrators have readily adopted such business functions as finance, accounting, planning, and public relations, they have been more skeptical about marketing.

Marketing has the image of being primarily a function for profit making enterprises. Educational administrators worry that marketing is manipulative and expensive, and that their boards will fell uncomfortable. Some administrators approach marketing with a "show-me" attitude. The burden of proof of the relevance of marketing falls to be marketer (Kotler & Fox, 1985).

Gupta is argued in his paper that anyone involved in marketing, particularly in marketing of distance education must understand that it is an organization- wide philosophy, which does not work unless everyone believes in it. Internal marketing is equally important and DE staff should have some marketing skills (Gupta, visited 1st February, 2005, http://www.ignou.ac.in/Theme-1/Dinesh%20K.%20Gupta.htm).

Someone in the organization must take action and develop a complete marketing program to reach consumers by using a combination of four tools called the 4P's (Berkovits, Kerin, Hartley and Rudelius, 1997). Four P's consist of product, price, promotion and place.

Product
Product is a good, service or idea is the consumer's needs for satisfying. Physical product can be described in terms of its physical characteristics and is what most people actually think of as the product (Pardey, 1991). Some author argued that education is a product. For example; Kaye suggests looking at distance education as a product instead of a tool for distributing education. He says that in order to most efficiently use our resources, the needs of the student/consumer should be assessed. By doing so, we can learn from the students and then apply that knowledge to attract future students while meeting the needs and improving upon the services offered to the current students (Butcher, visited 15th February, 2005, http://www.salzburgseminar.org/ASC/csacl/progs/disted/dedemo/review.htm)

In this paper, author uses the concept of product as DE institution itself. It's a different name, logo, color and physical attributes. We can say that DE institution is a brand and a brand is a way of differentiating one product from another; the greater the perceived similarity of products, the more important the brand in establishing the differences. Some schools will clearly feel that they are different from others, or that the market perceives differences, which makes it less important for them to establish their corporate identity (Pardey, 1991).

Price
What is exchanged for the product? It contains more than a value that someone will pay for it. The mean of price changes according to the different situations. DE Institutions have also pricing policy. All of DE institutions hope to increase their application and enrollment rates. Pricing policy may be one of the reasons that students are willing to choose any institution.

Place
Place is a means of getting the product into the consumer's hands. The personality of the place sends messages to the target audience.

Promotion
Promotion is a means of communication between the seller and buyer. It contains advertising, public relations, personal selling, publicity, and sales promotions.

All of them are consisting of institutions' marketing communication tools. Marketing communication is a communications with target audiences on all matters that affect marketing and business performance. It involves the management of the marketing communication mix (Picton & Broderic, 2001). Marketing communication is a continuous dialogue between an institution/brand and consumers. Because of the rapid rising amount of DE Institutions, they have to put their institution's differences among others. Why do the students choose that DE institutions among competitor? What's their mission? Are those institutions know and satisfy their publics (employee, students, donors, faculties etc.)

Table: 2 shows that how DE institutions use marketing communication to talk to their target audiences.

Table 2:
Target Audiences and Marketing Communication Tools of Distance Education

	Communication Channels	Target audiences
Distance Education Institations	Advertising Public relations Sponsorship Promotions Word-of-mouth Corporate communication	Students students' families employee faculties/academic staff donors government supplier

DE institutions must start with the idea of what its corporate brand. The corporate brandcomprise three discrete but overlapping concepts: personality, identity and image. Corporate personality is a term used in similar way to a person's personality. It's essentially, who the organization is?. This question replied by Borca, with some descriptions as hardness, sincerity, expertise, excitement and sophistication (Borca, 2002). Corporate identity the means by which corporate personality is projected, transmitted or communicated. It's the basis on which the organization is known and understood (whether or not this is deliberate and planned, intentional or unintentional, managed well or badly). Corporate image is the impression created by the corporate identity. It's the perceptions held of the organization by its audiences. Corporate image is what is felt and thought about and organization (Picton &Brodenic, 2001).

DE institutes must constitute their personality. It's may be an expert, sincere, modern or sophistic. Their identities consist of social, ethical, ideological, economical and quality behavior of the institutions. The messages of the DE institution are sent by incorporate or out of the corporate. The decision that an institution must decide is which communication channel are used in transmitting the DE institutions' message. They are able to use advertising, public relations, sponsorships, word-of-mouth and promotions to publics.

CONCLUSION

Distance education has continuously evolved as technology has improved. From the early 1800's to present day, educators have utilized this method of instruction to reach those unable to interact face to face due to various circumstances. Today, more than eleven universities are utilizing from DE in throughout of the world.

The marketing concept has been gaining importance in distance education. Marketing provides tools for comparing what the institution is actually doing with its stated mission and goals. Student needs, societal expectations are changing and competitions are increasing. Competitiveness in the marketplace forces DE institutions putting their uniqueness. This uniqueness will be constituted by corporate personality, identity and image. And than, DE institutions communicate their messages to the related groups (students, workers, employee, students' families etc.) using with marketing communication tools which we named advertising, public relations, sponsorships, word-of-mouth and promotions.

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