

MARKETING OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES TECHNOLOGY VS HUMAN FACTOR

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Abstract:

Nelson Mandela once said that, Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Adding some words to it, today we can say that if education is the weapon then technology is the arrow that makes education hit the customers straight and helps change the world better. Marketing of education is gaining impetus with the entry of private institutions and universities, growing awareness amongst the masses, change in people's attitude towards education and life and the growing span for the different courses being offered. The technological advancements and shrinking global boundaries have increased the significance of marketing for education services. People no more mind traveling anywhere around the world to get right kind of an education for themselves. Marketing of education can therefore be defined as promoting educational services to the customers in order to successfully meet the needs of the customer and at the same time giving profit to the service provider thus benefiting the customer, the service provider and society at large. Technology helps the service provider in positioning the service right in the minds of the customers

Education has today become a household commodity courtesy, the level of awareness created by various forms of technology. Technology has also helped the service provider create need for various educational services. This awareness has not only led to more people looking for educational options but has also led to growing competition in the educational sector and hence overall led to a greater demand of better educational services. Media has also led to the growing acceptance and glorification of some un-conventional courses which were once taken as a taboo to specific gender and segments of the society. And indeed looking at the present scenario, one can say that technology has put both the service provider and the receiver at a WIN-WIN position. The educational service is a high contact delivered by the people to the people and for the people. But with innovations in technology and more people

becoming technology savvy the high human contact education service is losing its significance. Newspapers, television, radios, internet, cellphones have all acted as facilitators in the marketing of educational services. Technology like these and more help the customer of today take a calculated decision when it comes to making a decision about choosing the right educational service for one. It is today not uncommon to see advertisements of various Institutes scrolling at the bottom of the screen of our television screen as the newsreader is busy reading news. As the education service is intangible, inseparable and perishable, certain implications exist for marketing pure educational services. Will technology just help the educational service provider in the effective marketing of their service or will it one day replace the instructors in the classrooms is a statement worth debating on. But, standing today we can with conviction say that Technology can surely compliment classroom- face-to-face high contact teaching but can never supplement it in any sense.

MARKETING THE INTANGIBLE & SELLING A PROMISE:

The educational service sector includes schools, colleges, universities and training centers. Marketing of educational services is marketing the intangible. It is marketing a concept which is truly experiential. It is like selling a promise, promise of a better tomorrow and life thereafter. Marketing of educational services mainly rests on promises and relationships. Promises look promising, when the personal sources of the customer vouch for the quality service provider. While framing a promise, the service provider therefore, must keep in mind the service quality dimensions important to the customers. Some of these quality dimensions, customers are most sensitive to are defined as follows:

- 1. Reliability:** We will deliver what we have promised
- 2. Assurance:** Your child / future is in safe hands.
- 3. Tangibles:** Best Infrastructure using the most modern technology for service delivery, beautiful surroundings, the Institute's uniform

4. **Empathy:** We understand your needs like no one else does.
5. **Responsiveness:** Value added programs/ we are ready to answer all your queries or give solutions to all your problems with a smile.

Education as a service is a risk proposition. The perceived risk in services is higher compared to products. Since education is the foundation of every person's future and life, everyone wants to play safe when taking a decision on enrollment in an educational Institution. Credibility of the service provider thus becomes important for the receiver of the service. Stronger the brand name of the service provider less will be the perceived risk. It is not uncommon to find generations of a family going to the same school or university i.e. because the family has perceived less risk in sending their child to the same service provider and with the passage of time the provider was successful in sustaining a relationship with its customers.

If the service provider is an old established one, then reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness has all been tested over time but if the service provider is a new entrant than tangible cues will be more important than any other dimension. Because, a new player cannot talk about past, it can simply portray a beautiful picture of the future based whereas an old player can very well talk about past as well as based on that past portray a beautiful picture of tomorrow.

FOCUSING ON THE AUGMENTED MARKETING MIX:

When making a promise, the education provider needs to focus on its people, process and the physical evidence (apart from the other 4 P's of the marketing mix) component of the service delivery to make it more communicable. The infrastructure, the technology used, the surrounding, the Institute's prospectus, the processes involved in the effective delivery of the service right from admission to final placements, the faculty in the form of teachers and students in the form of alumni, pricing which looks like value for money pricing all acts like a USP for educational marketers.

PEOPLE: Teachers and support staff (Internal customer to the service provider) and students and alumni (External customer to the service provider)

PROCESS: From admission to the final placement

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE & SERVICESCAPE: Infrastructure, surrounding, the landscape, brochures, signages, advertisement material and the like.

INTERNAL MARKETING WORKS MORE:

The focus of marketing in educational services is mainly internal. The formula is simple.

Internal marketing concept in services marketing treats its Employees as its internal customers. The essence of this concept is that the way in which the company treats its external customers as king and designs the service product around them similarly they should treat the internal customers well and design the job products around their needs in order to get the maximum output from them.

Make your internal customers (employees) happy who will then give their best in service delivery. After getting the best from the employees in terms of behavior and service product the external customers become happy. Example a happy teacher can make a lot of difference in the life of a student. A motivated teacher can not just motivate his students but also guide them to master their lives and career. Motivation in people delivering service is especially important in case of pure classroom high contact services where people deliver services to people. A demotivated teacher on the other hand, will not only take out the frustration on the students but will also make the lesson dis-interesting. Internal marketing therefore aims at motivating the internal customers through proper selection (hiring the best people), finding the right skill-job profile fit, developing and training employees to deliver services as promised, designing a reward system and retaining the best employees.

The simple ideology of internal marketing is:
Happy Employees will give Happy Customers

Happy external customers can greatly contribute towards the overall growth of the organization in terms of referring the service provider to other friends. One happy customer can spread positive word of mouth publicity and therefore can help the firm attract many new customers whereas dissatisfied customers can spoil the reputation of the service provider. Customers rely more on their personal sources than other mass media sources in case of educational services.

Motivated staff and people using the right process & technology give rise to Motivated customers who will spread a positive word of mouth.

More positive the word of mouth more will be the response from the customers and therefore, will be good news for the service provider

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING TO RETAIN STUDENTS:

Relationship marketing is the process of

attracting, maintaining, and enhancing relationships of the target .Relationship marketing refers to all activities directed to establishing, developing, and maintaining successful long-term relationships (Berry, 1995; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).The long term relationship with both your internal customers and external customers will facilitate both employee and customer retention.

Relationships marketing is about building and sustaining relations, how you relate to customers, it's about managing Customer Experience and providing services that are valued by the customers and from time to time exceeding the customer expectations. The emphasis is on building relationships based on mutual trust and commitment. .The trust and commitment comes from the social bonding between the management and the employees and further between the management, employees and student. Relationship marketing aims at meeting and exceeding the expectations of the employees and the students. This in the longer run will bring about transformation of students into loyal alumni and the employees into loyal employees.

Relationships will cement the base of student retention. To survive and sustain in this highly competitive environment, educational institutions need to acknowledge the importance relationship marketing strategies to promote student retention to build long-term relationships with students and other stakeholders. Student retention strategies may include student employment opportunities, student involvement in campus life, student counseling services, number and variety of courses offered, cultural activities, academic clubs, remedial classes, skill enhancement programs, regular communication with the parents, giving personal touch to students, all aiming at developing a feeling of belongingness and goodness in the students who will later become alumni. This feeling of belongingness, if strong, will stay with the student throughout .Whenever, later in life, if they are asked for an institution they will recommend the one they have studied in, the one with whom they share a bond with. Movement from mass marketing to niche relationship marketing is happening in a lot of educational institutions. Every member of the service organization should be involved in the process of relationship management. You can simply not give the relationship building responsibility to a single group in the organization. Every member should be equally responsible and should understand the importance of relationships in the institute.

Efforts should be taken to minimize

Complaints. Every complaint should be taken constructively. Regular feedback sessions should therefore be initiated. WEB Based and LAN based complaint management systems can also be brought in, to make the system more formal. Relationship marketing offers an efficient way of keeping a track of students' expectations, their likes dislikes, their concerns, their fears then incorporating it all in the service product .This will lead to offering services that are meaningful to the customers. Relationship building starts from the first day a student enters the institute and activities carry on forever.

TECHNOLOGY AS A FACILITATOR CUM ROAD BLOCKER

Technology ever since, has acted as a facilitator both in the delivery and the marketing of service. Use of LCD projectors, OHP's, laptops etc are facilitating smooth delivery of the service whereas the internet, television, radio and newspapers have led to the effective marketing of services.

But now the question arises, was education not effectively delivered in the ancient times i.e. times when there was no defined existence of technology. If not, then how did the students studying under the Gurukul system learn the art of mastering life?

Is the use of technology the only parameter of judging the quality of education? Not really, since the parameters of judging service quality varies from individual to individual.

Some individuals may take it as a facilitator and some may take it a burden.

Imagine a student using a multimedia kit after going through the instructions on the cover and suddenly encounters a problem and doesn't know how to get out of the problem and therefore looks out for human help who might have designed the multimedia kit or the one who has an understanding of the kit operation. Finally , comes a realization that human beings who created technology or who master the use of technology come to the help of customers. Again when technology fails, human interventions come into play.

On the contrary, one can imagine a situation where in class the student encounters a problem and without the waste of any time puts it across to the instructor, who is ready to answer all the endless questions of the student with a smile.

Imagine a different situation where the instructor is about to start a class using an LCD projector, the presentation is ready and is about to GET, SET, GO and suddenly GO becomes GOES and electricity goes away or there is a technical

problem with the projector. To fix the generator or resolve the problem with the projector a lot of time is wasted. In the meantime if the instructor is well read he can handle such crises by controlling the class through his knowledge. Again, proving that technology can compliment high contact class room teaching but can never really replace or supplement it

PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES (FOCUS MORE ON WORD OF MOUTH PUBLICITY THAN ADVERTISING)

The promotion of educational services is primarily facilitated through the use of technology. Media has made 'education' a household commodity today. It has not only created awareness but also unrest in the minds of the customer and has made them to think and rethink whether they are getting the best from a service provider or not. This awareness has made the customer more demanding and wise.

The media has provided the customers a platform where the customer is taken as the king,. Customers not only get informed but at times get confused also with excess information leading to clutter in their minds.

Advertising, Publicity, personal selling (through counseling and personal presentations) and sales promotion (through various scholarships and discounts) all help in the promotion of services and its positioning in the minds of the customer.

Fairs, exhibitions and various road shows all give a platform for educational institutions to showcase their service product and reach their right segment.

Imagine advertisements of admission to various management colleges, each college claiming to be better than any other player in the market. Once you open the educational supplement of any paper you will find big one page ad taking about infrastructure, placements, faculty and so on. And then, there are smaller ads claiming more or less similar things. Unfortunately, in our country there is no defined body to judge the authenticity of these ads, a body that can identify gaps between promises and service delivery and even penalize educational institutions making false claims.

If there are too many advertisements of the same service provider, the customers tends to perceive the offering as under selling. When the service provider comes up with an innovative solution then advertising should be used in order to create awareness and a market for the service provider and

help it gain acceptability. Word of mouth is initiated by customers who have already used the service.

INTERNET AND GLOBALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES:

We are often told that education must be made more efficient by being forced into the market model, moving away from the traditional concept of education which was a publicly provided social good. Education can be sold and promoted globally .Distance is no longer an obstacle. Internet has helped bridging gaps between nations. It has given an insight to the developed countries where they view globalization as an opportunity to expand markets for their educational products, processes and services in developing countries and even some under developed countries. This essentially means opportunities abroad for students who can afford higher costs. Admission centers of various foreign universities claiming 'Study in UK, Australia and Canada' through defined consultants have become popular in our country. It is a hyped market in our country.

DISTANCE LEARNING AND ONLINE PROGRAMS:

Internet has led to the transformation of the educational workplace through various distance learning programs. The idea of these programs is to develop learning modules in which the knowledge of the instructor is extracted, rooted into and finally channelized through on-line programs owned and controlled by the management of companies. On line programs require the standardization of modules for a specified target segment. But, we talk about the customization of services for effective customer centric delivery. The distance learning programs can be typically customized according to the needs of a particular group which is generally fairly large in size but then what happens to the individual query. In distance learning education the teacher cannot evaluate verbal and non verbal cues of the student which decides on the level of effectiveness of communication. Feedack is possible in distance learning modules but it is generally a delayed kind of a feedback, whereas in classroom teaching there is an immediate feedback. The education through computers through its symbolic presentation make the lessons interesting but since this system believes in 'one-size fits all' concept' therefore, can never replace the mainstream face to face education. But the distance learning and other online programs have made the dreams of a lot of working people to add a course to their Curriculum Vitae while they are still working, come true.

Conclusion:

Marketing of educational services has facilitated the growth of population which is educated, conscious and holds a strong urge to get educated in the best Institutions. At the same time it has allows more entry of players who provide quality service giving rise to more competition .With the growth of competition the customer gets more information and thus gets the status of a King. Media has played a pivotal role in creating the awareness about the need of education, making the customer wiser and has also increased the options for players to enter the education market. Media has also contributed to clutter in the minds of the customer leading to more confusion. Internet has led to the globalization of educational services. The contribution of technology in promoting the educational service provider and also as facilitator of service delivery has to be acknowledged. Student retention strategies should get due importance to build stronger, long lasting

relationships with the students. Relationship marketing is the key to retain, understand and exceed the expectations of customers. But since like any other service, educational services are experiential it is the human factor that plays the most important role. Hence, it is the human factor that rules. Keep your employees happy and they in turn will keep your customers happy. A word of mouth recommendation from an existing customer can do much more than a big advertisement in the newspaper. Classroom face to face teaching cannot be replaced by online teaching and thus technology can never replace the teacher in the class.

References:

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SERVICE PROFIT CHAIN FOR EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

PRE PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION

POST PRODUCTION / EXPERIENCE

