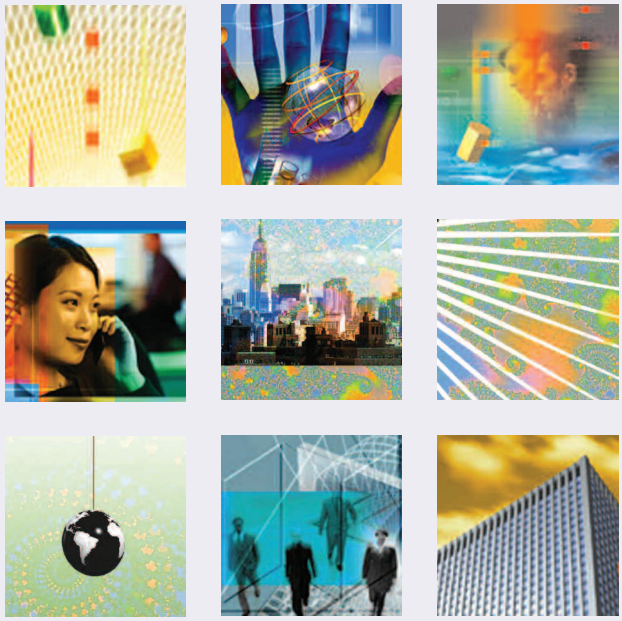

MARKETING CONTINUING EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Since the original compilation of *Marketing Continuing Education* in 2003, much in the world of marketing communications has changed dramatically. Messages today are disseminated at a remarkable rate and come increasingly from a virtual landscape, sometimes masking their point of origin. It's more important than ever to have a solid understanding of all aspects of marketing.

Successful marketing still requires strong, consistent internal commitment and leadership, but learners have changed. Their needs for knowledge have changed. And, consequently, the tools to attract and engage these students have changed as well. When it comes to these new networks of continuing education prospects, "the more things change, the more our need to change stays the same." (Alphonse Karr, Les Guêpes, January 1849)

To be effective marketers, we need to ask ourselves:

- Would new types of programming emerge if we fulfilled learners' needs, in addition to filling our classrooms?
- Could their needs, in turn, fuel more effective, more successful marketing efforts?
- Are we marketing a relationship with our learners that, as in the past, still elevates us as the providers of knowledge? Or are we participants in an educational network?

The answers lie with the learners themselves, because the more we know about their learning needs, the clearer our marketing directions are. The marketing process implies a series of interactions between us and our prospective and current students. In the past, these interactions would have been characterized as customer relationship marketing (CRM), which includes the capture, storage, analysis, and outreach based on managing this relationship.

Our realization is that not only has our relationship with learners changed, but that the tools needed to reach learners are also are changing. Consequently, we are now conducting learner relatinonship marketing (LRM), not customer relationship marketing (CRM).

Learners define your business as never before. They tell you what they want—shorter courses, new concentrations, or different formats. Since adult learners' needs vary throughout their lifetimes, you market the entire institution, not just individual programs, which means marketers and programmers have to work more closely in response to student input and changes in the marketplace. Consequently, successful marketers are building a new marketing paradigm: a continuing education model with interactivity at its core.

Learner relationship management, or "LRM," emphasizes learning as the source of value, not as buying. It recognizes the intersecting and overlapping aspects of the value of knowledge today, for the individual learner; for networks of learners; and for the academic, research, and administrative resources of the institution. This updated marketing relationship embraces the new realities and tools of the marketing process—one in which there is a greater awareness of the power of integrated marketing and of a developing reliance on innovations in interactive marketing.

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THE NEW MARKETING LANDSCAPE

ESTABLISH YOUR MARKETING VISION

Before the planning process begins, you must define the mission of your institution.

The marketing campaign must account for and accommodate an institution's sense of itself, usually embodied in its mission. At the same time, the most effective marketing campaigns carry a deep understanding of the audience—in our case, the learner. In marketing continuing education, we seek to understand, serve, and celebrate all learners. We must prove to them in our programs and course descriptions that we have done our homework.

With today's learner-centric values at the forefront, an institution must accept the marketing challenge by making some important and very specific decisions. Every time a brochure or catalog is published, every time an advertisement appears, every time a website is visited, every time a keyword is searched, readers are getting information not only about the course or courses being promoted, but also about the institution itself.

Is the area or field you are proposing to serve with continuing education one that your university wants to be in? If so, will the administration give its wholehearted support to your efforts? Are your continuing education programs currently considered "not-for-profit," that is, unable to generate student interest and financial growth? Do you have competition for your audience?

As these questions demonstrate, marketing touches so many areas of interest and concern, and is crucial to the success of the institution; consequently, there is always the temptation to market by committee. That does not work.

PROVIDE LEADERSHIP

Successful marketing requires a leader to be in charge. The marketing process requires someone knowledgeable about the institution, the market, and the procedures that bring these together. Whoever is put in charge must have the authority to accomplish the planning, implementation, and coordination. Authority must be allocated before responsibility can be assigned. Messages must be repeated to the same audiences frequently, and new audiences need to be reached, time and again. Time and determination are even more important than money, so long-term commitment is vital.

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A large portion of the marketer's authority is implicit in the budget available for marketing. What really matters isn't how much money is involved, but whether the person has the authority to spend that money.

Hundreds of instruments and methods are available to marketing professionals. These tools help determine the target audience for a program, where and how they can be reached, and which media most efficiently reach them.

CREATE YOUR MARKETING TEAM

An effective marketer must be able to decide which tools to use, when and how to use them, and how to value the measurements obtained at specific times in the process. While service bureaus produce ad hoc brochures and ads, it takes a marketing team to plan and implement integrated strategic marketing campaigns in a cost-effective manner. As the tools required for today's marketers are constantly evolving, colleges often face both generational and informational leadership gaps as they attempt to establish effective marketing plans.

It takes a marketing team to plan and implement integrated strategic marketing campaigns in a cost-effective manner.

Consequently, the marketing staff must function as both a team and as team leaders by developing strong internal communication and support mechanisms for acquiring input, evaluating criticism, and structuring participation from its members and from other parts of the institution. For example, periodic program staff meetings that assess marketing efforts and results by objective criteria engender a sense of partnership and produce collaboration.

Between meetings, the collaborative partnership should be reinforced informally through phone calls and memos. A program staff that is informed of progress and new developments will reciprocate in kind.

If your institution accepts the challenge of marketing, these steps must be followed:

- Define the institution's mission—in writing
- Obtain long-term commitment from the administration
- Establish authority and budget control
- Develop internal planning and reporting mechanisms
- Take on a team approach
- Create a plan

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