

EFFICIENCY OF INTERNATIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMMES' MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the thesis was to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of international degree programmes' marketing and to make suggestions how to improve it. There are three English-taught degree programmes at Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OUAS): Degree Programme in Information Technology (DIT), Degree Programme in International Business (DIB) and Degree Programme in Business Information Technology (BIT). The reason for this thesis was that these programmes offered at OUAS are not able to attract enough Finnish and European students. About 70-80% of the applicants come from outside of Europe and in most cases they are not eligible or if they are they are not able to start their studies for various reasons.

The theoretical part of the thesis focused on marketing communications and the marketing of higher education institutions.

The research part of the thesis was done as a quantitative research in a survey form for the students participating at the entrance examinations held in Oulu 26 – 28.4.2012. The survey aimed to map the level of attendees' exposure to the marketing activities of OUAS. Additionally the survey collected information about the influences which motivated the applicants to choose these degree programmes.

The conclusion of this thesis was that the main influences for applicants were motivation to study their respective fields, career opportunities after graduation, internationality of the programmes, location of the OUAS and exchange opportunities. Suggestions for OUAS were to emphasize these factors in their marketing and to focus on internet marketing as it was the most used channel among respondents. Also looking into market segmentation was suggested.

Keywords: Oulu University of Applied Sciences, marketing of higher education institutions, marketing communication, international degree programme

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research was to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of international degree programmes' marketing and make suggestions how to improve it. There are three English-taught degree programmes at Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OUAS): Degree Programme in Information Technology (DIT), Degree Programme in International Business (DIB) and Degree Programme in Business Information Technology (BIT). The reason for this thesis was that these programmes offered at OUAS are not able to attract enough Finnish and European students. About 70-80% of the applicants come from outside of Europe and in most cases they are not eligible or if they are they are not able to start their studies for various reasons.

The goal of the current marketing plan of OUAS is to improve the recognizability of international degree programmes, to recruit diligent and motivated students for the programmes, to increase cultural diversity and to attract Finnish and European students and fill all the starting places for the programmes. Desired ratios would be that half of the starting students are Finnish while the rest are of foreign origin. The desired target groups are: Finnish 18 to 25 year old on their last year of high school or vocational school or graduates from those schools; 18 to 30 year old living in Finland with a Finnish high school level education or comparable foreign degree; and 18 to 30 year old foreigners from following countries: Russia, China, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and United Kingdom.

The channels used in the campaign are following: direct mailing of Studies in English -brochure; theme website Find Your Match; information about applying to international degrees on OUAS Facebook page and interviews in web magazine Extra; newspaper advertisements in City, Six Degrees and Forum24; search engine (Google) advertisements; additional Facebook advertisements; and web banners on OUAS website.

1.1 Oulu University of Applied Sciences

Oulu University of Applied Sciences began to offer higher education in 1992. With approximately 9000 students and a staff of 800 it is one of the largest universities of applied sciences in Finland and the largest one in Northern Finland. OUAS has schools in the cities of Oulu, Raahe and

Oulainen and each of the schools hosts different units. In 2007 the university admitted approximately 1800 students to its degree programmes. OUAS offers Bachelor and Master level programmes. There are 30 degree programmes leading to a Bachelor's degree and eight leading to a Master's degree. Three of the Bachelor's degrees and two of the Master's degrees are taught entirely in English. These international degree programmes attract many foreign students and add to the international aspect of the school.

Studies at the universities of applied sciences are more practically oriented than those at the regular universities. By combining theory oriented higher education with practical experience universities of applied sciences aim to provide students with qualifications and skills that match the requirements of working life. Part of the studies is work practice where students work as trainees in companies related to their field of study. Bachelor's theses are also prepared at companies and require the students to use their knowledge and education to solve real world problems. (Oulu University of Applied Sciences 2012, date of retrieval 8.4.2013)

1.2 Purpose and objectives

The following research questions are based on the objectives and purpose as well as the theoretical framework of the thesis. These research questions are as follows:

- How effective the current marketing campaign has been in attracting applicants from desired segments?
- What factors are relevant for the desired segments when choosing education?
- How to improve international programmes' marketing in the future to reach set goals?

The research was pursued as a quantitative research. The information was gathered in survey forms from applicants taking part at the international degree programmes' entrance examinations at the end of April 2012. The results are analyzed and discussed in Chapter Four, suggestions and recommendations will be given in Conclusion and Discussion chapters.

The theory part of the thesis starts with marketing of higher education institutions. After that the thesis will focus on marketing communications process and tools.

2. MARKETING OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

As the world is becoming more international there is a growing demand for professionals capable of effectively functioning in this environment. There has been a steady increase in international programmes being offered by higher education institutions all over Europe. In particular these programmes have seen rise in countries where English is not the official or dominant language such as Germany, Netherlands, many countries in Eastern Europe and all of the Nordic countries. Oulu University of Applied Sciences offers three degrees: DIB, BIT and DIT to compete in the market of international education. (Wächter B. & Maiworm F. 2008, 91.)

2.1 Education and marketing

This chapter covers what marketing is, how educational institutions use it, what is marketing orientation, and what benefits marketing can bring to educational institutions.

2.1.1 Definition of marketing for educational institutions

Educational institutions tend to view marketing as a combination of advertising and public relations. Most people tend to think it is the same as selling and promotion. In fact it is more about needs assessment, marketing research, product development, pricing and distribution. The aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. This means the need to buy comes from customer and there is no need to sell the product. Marketing is vital for modern institutions. To survive and succeed institution must know their target market, attract needed resources and convert these resources into programs and services, and distribute them to the institution's consumers. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 7)

Marketing of educational institutions can be defined as:

“Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets to achieve institutional objectives. Marketing involves designing the institution’s offerings to meet the target markets’ needs and desires and using effective pricing, communication and distribution to inform, motivate and service the markets.” (Kotler & Fox 1985, 7)

2.1.2 Educational institutions' responses to market changes

Educational institutions can be divided into three groups according to their responses to market changes. The institution might find it harder to attract resources or the enrollment might be declining. The institution must find a way to remedy the problem. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 8.) For OUAS the problem is that its international degree programmes do not attract enough applicants from target markets.

The first group of institutions does little or nothing. There might have been no change in enrollment or if it has declined administrators believe the decline is temporary or easily handled. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 9.)

The response of the second group is to increase the budget of the admissions office, the institution's so called "sales department." With the increased budget the admissions office can improve their marketing efforts. They can use more marketing channels, place more ads, issue new catalogs, and generally raise awareness about the institution and its offerings. However aggressive promotion might attract the wrong students to the college. These students might drop out when the college does not match expectations created by the marketing. Also this approach can create an illusion among the administrators that the institution has sufficiently responded to the declining enrollment. The reason for declining enrollment might not be the institution's marketing activities but the product or programs it offers. Placing too much focus on the marketing may slow down needed work on product improvement, which is the basis of all good marketing. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 9.)

The third group of institutions respond with a genuine marketing approach. These institutions analyze their environment, markets and competition; assess their existing strengths and weaknesses; and develop a clear sense of mission, target markets and market positioning. They have adopted marketing orientation which should be a goal for all educational institutions. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 9-10.)

2.1.3 Marketing orientation

"A marketing orientation holds that the main task of the institution is to determine the needs and wants of target markets and to satisfy them through the design,

communication, pricing and delivery of appropriate and competitively viable programs and services.” (Kotler & Fox 1985, 10.)

In business, marketing orientation or market orientation means that the customer is the central focus of marketing. Companies give careful consideration of the wants and needs of consumers, and how they can meet those demands with their products or services. They conduct research and collect data about their consumers to offer them products or services to better suit the consumers needs. This marketing oriented approach can be used by educational institutions also. It does not mean however that the institution ignores its mission and its competencies by trying to offer educational programs that seem popular at the moment. The institution looks for target groups who are or could be interested in its programs and then adapts these programs to be attractive. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 10.)

2.1.4 Benefits of marketing

The institutions that understand marketing principles and apply them are likely achieve their objectives effectively. There are four benefits marketing can provide for educational institutions:

1. Greater success in fulfilling the institution’s mission.

Marketing provides tools for analyzing the institutions strengths and weaknesses and its market environment. With the aid of these tools the institution can identify problems and plan responses that will help fulfill its mission. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 12.)

2. Improved satisfaction of the institution’s publics.

Institutions that are insensitive to clients’ needs and desires or if they do not know the needs and desires of their target markets find it difficult to attract and hold students and support. Marketing emphasizes the importance of measuring and satisfying consumers’ needs. Institution that is focused on marketing is likely to produce improved level of client satisfaction. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 13.)

3. Improved attraction of marketing resources.

Institutions need resources to be able to function and to fulfill their mission. These resources can be students, employees and other support. Marketing provides the means to attract these resources effectively. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 13.)

4. Improved efficiency in marketing activities.

Marketing can help to develop attractive educational programs and effective communication. Knowledge of marketing allows educational institutions to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of their marketing activities. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 13.)

2.2 The elements of marketing

In this chapter will be covered the basic elements of marketing which are the concepts of wants, needs, demands and exchange. Also the chapter will cover characteristics of a responsive institution.

2.2.1 Needs, wants, demands and exchange

People need air, water, food, clothing and shelter to survive. When these needs are met people have a desire for belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. Human need can be described as a deprivation of some basic satisfaction. Basic needs are not created by society or marketers. Instead they exist within human biology. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 20.)



FIGURE 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Kotler & Fox 1985, 199.)

Wants are desires for specific things that satisfy deeper needs. For example to satisfy a need for self-esteem a person might want to enroll to a prestigious university to get a degree. However individual wants vary. One person might feel satisfied with having completed high school whereas another person would want to get a Ph.D to feel satisfied. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 20.)

Demands are wants for specific products or services. Wants become demands when the customers have an ability and willingness to buy them. A person who wants to study at a prestigious private college would need to have the money to pay for the tuition. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 20.)

Exchange can be defined as an act of obtaining a desired product or benefit from someone by offering something in return. When people want something they satisfy their needs through exchange. For example a person exchanges money with a company to get a desired product. After the exchange both parties are better off. The person's need is satisfied and the company fulfills its purpose and mission to service customers and to make profit. Educational institution's purpose is to provide education. In exchange for providing education for students it fulfills its purpose and gains needed resources. If the other party feels the exchange was not beneficial in time the exchanges will decline. The institution needs students, faculty, facilities and equipment, and if it cannot attract these it will cease to exist. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 21.)

2.2.2. The responsive institution

Marketing is about satisfying consumers' needs and wants. A responsive institution aims to satisfy its consumers needs as best as it can within its mission and budget. Educational institutions vary in their level of responsiveness. In the next paragraphs three levels of institutional responsiveness are presented. These are unresponsive, casually responsive, and highly responsive institution. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 28-30.)

The unresponsive institution is usually very bureaucratic. It has a strict hierarchy and rules and impersonal policies designed to make the institution efficient. The institution is not set up to respond to people's problems. The institution's staff will service people and help them with their problems as long as it is within the institution's policies and their jurisdiction. These kind of institutions often assume that they know what people need. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 28.)

The casually responsive institution pays more attention to their students and publics. The institution listens to the students and its staff is easily reachable and willing to help. The institution also encourages suggestions from students and has student members present at the university committees. These actions increase consumer satisfaction. However the consumer satisfaction will go down if the institution only listens but does not do anything about the problems. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 29.)

Highly responsive institution is the same as casually responsive except it surveys its students regularly for consumer satisfaction and also for students needs and desires that are yet unmet. This type of institution is always trying to discover ways to improve its service. Additionally it encourages and trains its staff to be more student-minded. This mindset emphasizes that the purpose of the faculty's work are the students. Without the students there would be no institution. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 30-31.)

2.3 Segmenting and selecting markets

Educational institutions should try to identify the most attractive parts of the market that they could serve effectively. Some institutions use segmenting and focus their marketing on specific target groups but not all institutions. There are three possible ways of market segmentation. These are mass marketing, product-differentiated marketing and target marketing. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 175.)

2.3.1 Types of market segmentation

In mass marketing the educational institution distributes one marketing offer for the whole market and attempts to attract as many students as possible. Mass marketing does not take into account consumer preferences or different segments. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 175.)

An institution using product-differentiated marketing offers two or more programs and hopes that each potential student will find something among its offerings. The programs are not designed specifically to the needs and wants of different groups but rather the institution expects that suitable students will find the programs. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 175.)

The last type of market segmentation is target marketing. Target marketing is the most effective method to satisfy a market. In target marketing the institution segments the market into groups and selects most desirable segments to focus on. Then the institution develops programs and marketing to meet the needs of each of the selected markets. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 176.)

As educational needs are varied most educational institutions use mass marketing or product-differentiated marketing. However target marketing can offer three main benefits. When the institution is aware of specific segments and their wants and needs it can see when the needs are not being met. This creates market opportunities. Additionally the institution can make adjustments to its programs to better fulfill the needs of target segments. And lastly by having knowledge of the segments' desires and wants the institution can design more effective marketing communications to influence those segments. In order to use target marketing the institution must first segment the market and select the segments to focus on. Then the institution must develop marketing communications for each segment. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 176.)

2.3.2 Types of segments

Segments are distinct and meaningful groups of the market which might be worth designing separate programs or marketing communications. The marketing segmentation variables are geographical, demographic, psychographic and behavioristic. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 178-189.)

Geographical segmentation divides the market by location. The location may be as large as a nation or as small as a neighborhood. It assumes that consumers' needs and preferences vary according to where they live. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 178.)

Demographic segmentation divides the market by demographic variables like age, sex, income, education, nationality and so forth. It is the most commonly used segmentation variable. This is because consumer wants and preferences are often accurately associated with demographic variables. Also demographic variables are easier to define and measure than other segmentation variables. Lastly demographic characteristics of the target market influence the media they use. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 180.)

Last two segmentation variables are psychographic and behavioristic. Psychographic segmentation means dividing market into groups by social class, lifestyle or personality. For

example people with outgoing personalities and adventurous lifestyle might be drawn to a school that offers many exchange possibilities. Behavioristic segmentation divides the market by consumer responses to actual products or services. These can be for example the benefits the segments seek from the educational programme, their attitude towards it, how often they attend lectures, how ready they are to apply to the programmes and other things. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 182-185.)

Although there are many ways to segment a market the most useful segmentation has four key features. The segments are measurable so that their size and characteristics can be determined. The segments are accessible so that they can be reached effectively. The segments are substantial and large enough to be worth special marketing effort. The segments are durable so that they will persist over a longer period of time. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 188-189.)

2.4 Consumer buying process

It is important for the educational institution to know its consumers. Knowledge of the consumers or in this case students can give the institution clearer understanding what influences the students' decision to apply. This knowledge helps the institution to develop effective programs and to promote them. This chapter will cover the consumer buying process when choosing education. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 197.)

The buying process starts before the purchase and continues long after it. Choosing a school is a decision that may affect career, friendships, location of residence and general life satisfaction. There are five stages in the buying process: need arousal, information gathering, decision evaluation, decision execution, and post-decision assessment. These are shown in the figure below. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 198.)

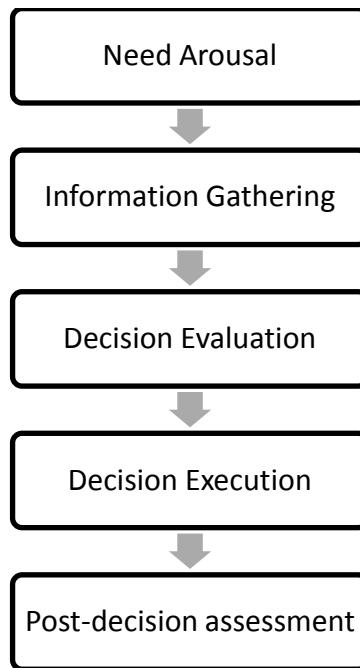


FIGURE 2. Five stages of consumer buying process (Kotler & Fox 1985, 198.)

2.4.1 Need arousal

First educational institutions should try to understand how the students develop their interest to apply. Need arousal can be explained through triggering factors, basic needs, and specific wants. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 198-200.)

Triggering factors mean the factors that initially spark the interest in students to get higher education. Interest can be triggered by internal or external factors. Internal factors come from within the person. The person begins to feel a need to do something. It can be physiological such as boredom or anxiety. External factors come from outside of the person. They are something that catches the person's attention or gets the person interested in the subject. External factors can be personal such as friends, family or teacher. They can also be non-personal such as article, advertisement or brochure. Additionally external factors can be divided into marketer-controlled like advertisements and non-marketer-controlled such as friends. Triggering factors for high school students are often: hearing other students talk about their college plans, meeting with student counselors to discuss their own plans, college brochures arriving in mail, and thinking about what they want to do in the future. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 198-199.)

The triggering factors do not create the need to apply to a school but rather can activate an already existing basic need. Educational institutions should understand what basic needs they might serve. As shown before in Figure 1 people have needs for safety, belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. People have different needs and values that affect choice of their study place. Some might choose the college in their hometown because their family and friends live there and this satisfies their need for safety and belonging. Some might travel far to attend a prestigious college because of their need for self-esteem and achievement. Any one college is unlikely to be able to fulfill all of the underlying needs. It is up to the student to decide among competing needs and different colleges. The institution could study what needs it is able to satisfy and emphasize those. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 199-200.)

Specific wants are specific programs and attributes students look for in a college. These can be discovered by surveying students what they want from a college. Students vary in what they want and how important they consider different attributes of the college. For example some might consider exchange opportunities to be of high importance when applying to a school whereas some might consider it irrelevant. As with basic needs no college can satisfy all the wants and preferences of students. The institution should shape itself to meet the wants of target segments it wants to attract. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 200.)

2.4.2 Information gathering

When students start planning to apply to a college they will need to gather information about different options. Their information gathering is affected by two factors: information neediness and information sources. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 200-203.)

People vary in their level of information neediness. Some might decide on a college quickly whereas some might study information and options for months before coming to a decision. There are two levels of information gathering. The first level is heightened attention in which the student becomes more aware of information about colleges. The student might notice news about colleges and listen to friends talk about college plans. The second level is active information search where student actively searches for information about colleges and programs they offer, reads through brochures and asks information from friends. The level of information neediness depends on how much information the student already has, how committed they are to finding

more, the value they get from additional information and the satisfaction of the search. Usually, the more complex and important the buying decision is the more consumers need information before deciding. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 201.)

Information sources can be divided into four groups: personal non-marketer-controlled (friends, family), personal marketer-controlled (sales representative), non-personal non-marketer-controlled (mass media), and non-personal marketer-controlled (advertisements, catalogs). Students will usually use many sources and receive different information from them. They will also place different value on the information from different sources. Whether they do it consciously or unconsciously the students consider the source's credibility. The source will be seen more credible if it is trustworthy, likeable and expert. Therefore a student would be more likely to trust information from a friend or family member who attends college than advertisement of the college. It is beneficial for educational institutions to study information sources as they affect the students decisions whether to apply. The college could for example conduct a survey among students what information sources they used and what influence the sources had on their decision to apply. These findings can then be used to develop more effective marketing communications. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 202-203.)

2.4.3 Decision evaluation and execution

In the information gathering process the student forms a clearer picture of the available choices. The decision evaluation happens through the process of choice narrowing. First the student eliminates certain choices and chooses the most desirable ones. Then the student weights the remaining choices and ranks them in order of preference. After this the student will apply to selected programs. The colleges a student will consider depends on their needs, wants and preferences. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 207.)

After the evaluation the student will apply to the most preferred colleges. There are however three factors that come into play before the execution. These are: attitudes of others, anticipated situational factors and unanticipated situational factors. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 210-211.)

Student will consider the attitudes of others before making the final decision. Most often this means the attitude of family towards the student's selected place of study. The student's

preference might change depending on how negative the other person's attitude is toward the student's choice and how motivated the student is to agree with the other person's opinion. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 210-211.)

Anticipated situational factors are the factors that the student expects to stay the same. These can be things such as place of residence, family income and expected benefits of the college program. Unanticipated situational factors are unexpected factors that affect the decision. The student might visit the campus and not like the look and feel of it. Or the student might find some information that changes college preferences. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 211.)

All these factors are influenced by perceived risk. Students might modify, postpone or avoid decisions because of the risk. The educational institution must understand the factors that create a feeling of risk in the consumer and provide information and support to help reduce it. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 211.)

2.4.4 Post-decision assessment

After enrolling to the institution the student will evaluate whether it matches expectations. The student will either feel a level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. A satisfied student will continue studying at the college and will likely provide positive word of mouth about the college. A dissatisfied student on the other hand might drop out or at least say bad things about the college. Educational institutions can help students feel good about the choice they made. The college can take the responsive institution approach and invite suggestions and complaints from the students and act on them. It can design communications to emphasize the school's values and reinforce the students' reasons for applying. Actions like these can prevent post-decision dissatisfaction. However, the school cannot only communicate positive image but it must also be able to offer the quality and attributes that were the reason students applied in the first place. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 211.)

3 MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing communications are the companies' methods to inform and persuade consumers about products and services the companies offer. This can be done directly or indirectly. Marketing communications is used to build relationships with consumers and to give a certain image of the brand to the public. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 510.)

Educational institutions need effective communications as much as companies do. It is not enough to develop good programs and make them available. Institutions also need to inform potential students about their offerings and raise interest in the institution. To do this the institution must understand its audience and have knowledge of marketing communications. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 277-278.)

This chapter will present the marketing communications process and various marketing communications tools that are available.

3.1 Marketing communications process

According to Kotler and Keller (2009), marketing communications process is characterized in two ways: macromodel and micromodel.

Communications planning should start with an understanding of the nine elements of every communication. The elements are shown in the communications macromodel figure below.

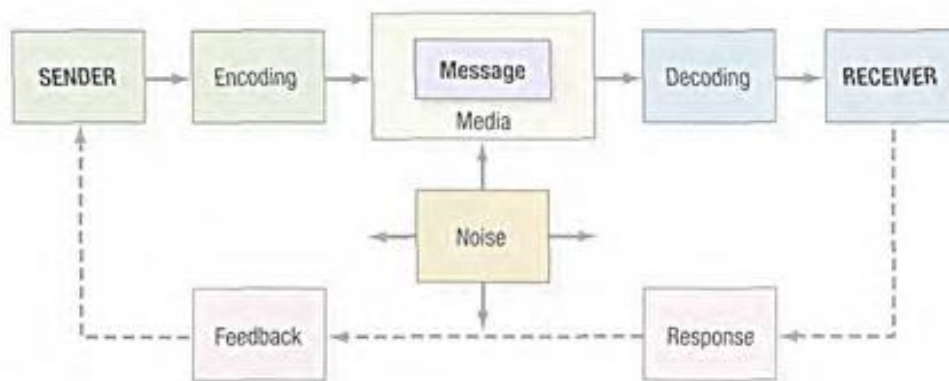


FIGURE 3. Communications macromodel with nine elements (Kotler & Keller 2009, 514.)

There are two main parties: a sender and a receiver. The message and the media represent the major communication tools. The other four figures represent the communication functions which are encoding, decoding, response and feedback. The random and competing messages that may distract the intended communication are represented by noise. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 514-515.)

The above model focuses on the key factors in effective communication. To communicate effectively, senders need to understand the audiences they want to reach and the results they want to obtain. The senders must be able to encode the messages in a way the target audience can decode them. This means that the sender must create such a message that the receiver will be able to understand and get the idea the sender is trying to convey. The sender must transmit the message over media to the target audience. Feedback channels must be developed so the sender can know the audience's response to the message. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 515.)

Micromodels of marketing communications are focused on consumers' responses to communications. Presented in the below figure are four classic response hierarchy models.

Response Hierarchy Models

Models

<i>Stages</i>	"AIDA" Model	"Hierarchy-of-Effects" Model	"Innovation-Adoption" Model	"Communication" Model
Cognitive stage	Attention ↓	Awareness ↓ Knowledge	Awareness ↓	Exposure ↓ Reception ↓ Cognitive response
Affective stage	Interest ↓ Desire	Liking ↓ Preference ↓ Conviction	Interest ↓ Evaluation	Attitude ↓ Intention
Behavior stage	Action	Purchase	Trial ↓ Adoption	Behavior

FIGURE 4. Response hierarchy models (Kotler & Keller 2009, 515.)

The basic assumption of all these models is that the buyer passes through three stages which are a cognitive, affective and behavioral stage. These stages can be understood as learning, feeling and doing. According to Kotler and Keller (2009):

“This “learn-feel-do” sequence is appropriate when the audience has high involvement with a product category perceived to have high differentiation, as in purchasing an automobile or house. An alternative sequence, “do-feel-learn” is relevant when the audience has high involvement but perceives little or no differentiation within the product category as in purchasing an airline ticket or personal computer. A third sequence, “learn-do-feel” is relevant when the audience has low involvement and perceives little differentiation within the product category, as in purchasing salt or batteries. By choosing the right sequence, the marketer can do a better job of planning communications.” (Kotler & Keller 2009, 515)

3.2 Developing effective communications

In the below figure are shown the eight steps in developing effective communications. Each step will be examined and explained.

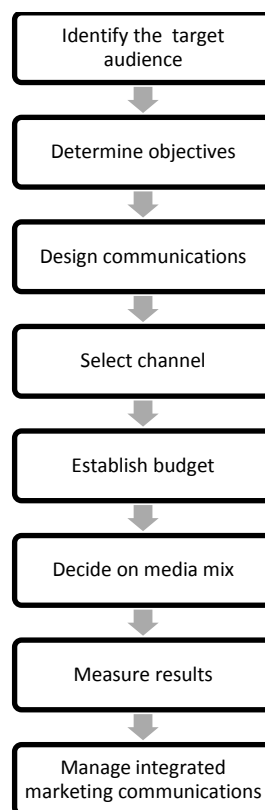


FIGURE 5. Steps in developing effective communications (Kotler & Keller 2009, 516.)

Identify the target audience

The process of developing effective communications must start with a clear picture of the target audience. For instance is the audience individuals, groups, deciders, influencers, particular publics or the general publics. The target audience effects all the steps. It decides what the commu-

nicator says, how it is said, when, where and to whom. Marketing research should be conducted before deciding on the target audience. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 516.)

Determine the communications objectives

The objective of the effective communications is to obtain a response from the target audience. There are four possible objectives which are category need, brand awareness, brand attitude and brand purchasing intention. Category need means how necessary the product is to fulfill a need in the target audience. Brand awareness is the ability to identify the communicator's brand within the category. Brand attitude is defined as the target audience's perception of the brand's ability to fill their relevant need. Brand purchasing intention is the target audience's likelihood to have an intent of making a purchase. Effective communications can often achieve multiple objectives. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 517.)

Design the communications

Three issues need to be considered when designing the message. According to Kotler and Keller (2009) these are: what to say (message strategy), how to say it (creative strategy) and who should say it (message source).

Select the communications channels

The communicator must select efficient media or channels of communication. There are two broad types of channels of communication: personal and nonpersonal. Kotler and Keller (2009) define personal communications channels when two or more persons communicate face-to-face, person-to-audience, over the telephone or through e-mail. In recent years instant messaging and independent sites to collect consumer reviews are another channel of growing importance. The effectiveness of personal communication channels is in its ability to individualize presentation and feedback. Especially word-of-mouth influence through neighbors, friends, family members and associates carries a great weight when deciding on a brand or product. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 522.)

Nonpersonal channels are defined by Kotler and Keller (2009) as *"communications directed to more than one person and include media, sales promotions, events and experiences and public relations."*

Even though personal communication is most of the time more effective than mass communication, mass communications play a vital role in stimulating personal communication. Therefore, communicators should aim to combine personal and nonpersonal channels of communication according to their communications objectives. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 523.)

Establish the total marketing communications budget

Kotler and Keller (2009) describe four common budgeting methods: affordable method, percentage-of-sales method, competitive-parity method and objective-and-task method. Affordable method simply means to set the budget at what the organization can afford. With the percentage-of-sales method the budget is set at a certain percentage of sales or of the sales price. Competitive-parity method is to set the promotion budget at the same level as competitors. Lastly objective-and-task method is to determine specific promotion objectives and the tasks to achieve them. The costs of the tasks are estimated and the sum of these is the promotion budget. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 524-525.)

Decide on media mix

When choosing the marketing communications mix the marketers must consider the advantages and costs of different communication tools. Also to be considered is the type of product market and consumers' readiness to make a purchase in that market (Kotler & Keller 2009, 535). The various tools are described in-depth in Chapter 3.2.

Measure results

The communicator must research the effects of the message on the target audience. The research may take many forms. It may involve surveys, feedback, polling members of the target audience whether they recognize or recall the message, how many times they saw it, how they felt about it and whether it made any changes in attitude towards the product or organization. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 531.)

Manage integrated marketing communications

American Association of Advertising Agencies defines integrated marketing communications as *“a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan. Such a plan evaluates the strategic roles of a variety of communications disciplines – for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations – and*

combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum impact through the seamless integration of messages.” In other words integrated marketing communications means to unify all the organization's brand images and messages. It can help to improve message consistency and to build a stronger brand and generate greater sales. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 531.)

3.3 Marketing communications tools

There are eight major marketing communications tools: advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word of mouth marketing and personal selling. Different companies and organizations use different marketing mixes depending on their area of business and the audiences they want to reach. Each of the tools have different characteristics, costs, strengths and weaknesses. It is up to the organization to select the ones most suitable for their communications. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 512.)

According to Kotler and Keller (2009) all of these marketing communication activities “...*contribute to brand equity and drives sales in many ways: by creating awareness of the brand; linking the right associations to the brand image in consumers' memory; eliciting positive brand judgments or feelings; and/or facilitating a stronger consumer-brand connection.*” This is demonstrated in the figure below.

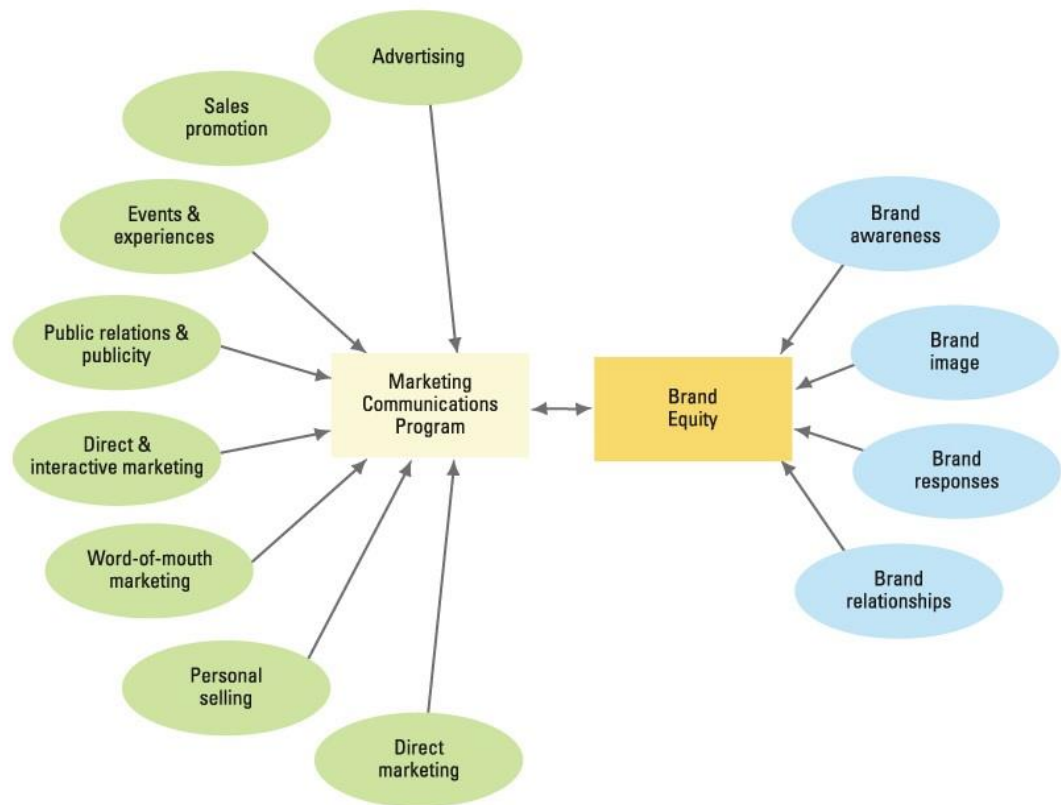


FIGURE 6. Marketing communications contribute to brand equity (Kotler & Keller 2009, 513.)

Advertising

Advertising can be defined as paid non-personal presentation and promotion of products or services by an identified sponsor. The characteristics of advertising are that the message can be repeated many times, it allows the advertiser to create an image of the organization or product and the target audience is not required to respond to the advertisement (Kotler & Keller 2009, 527, 538.)

There are “five Ms” to consider when planning an advertising campaign. These are: Mission: What are the advertising objectives? Money: How much to spend? Message: What message should be sent? Media: What media to use? Measurement: How to evaluate the results? These decisions are summarized in the next image. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 538.)

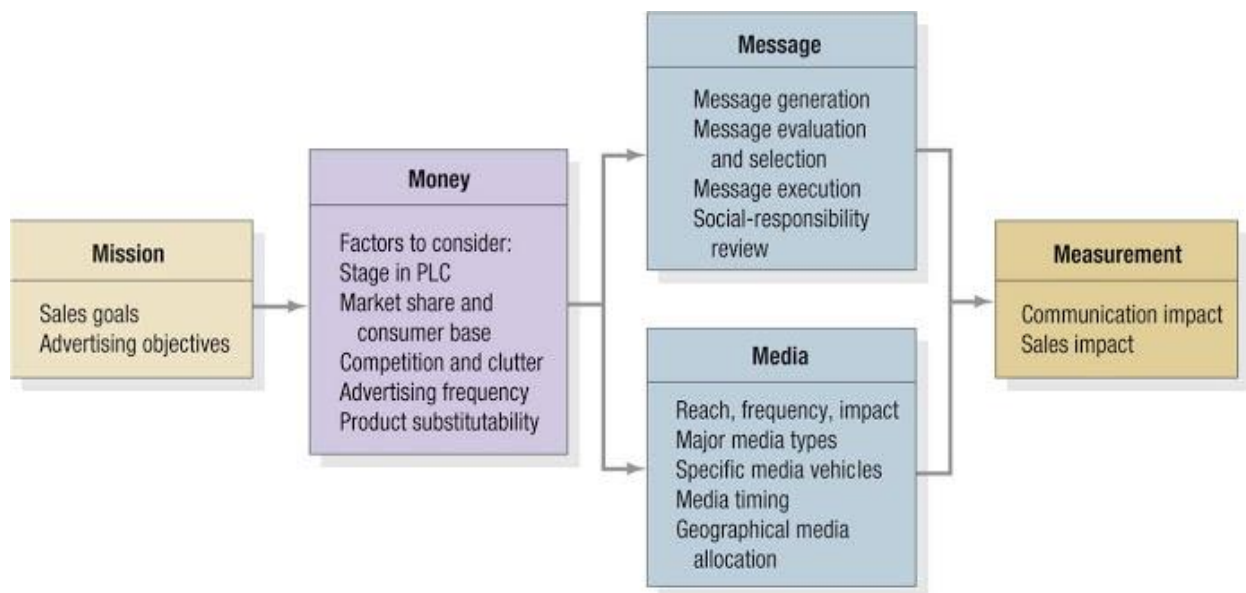


FIGURE 7. The five Ms (Kotler & Keller 2009, 538.)

Kotler and Keller (2009) describe advertising objective as “...a specific communications task and achievement level to be accomplished with a specific audience in a specific period of time.” These objectives can be classified by their aim that can be to inform, persuade, remind or reinforce.

Deciding the advertising budget will depend on the advertising objectives and the advertising program to accomplish those objectives. Some media will be more expensive than others, some reach more of the target audience and some can be repeated more frequently. Therefore the advertiser must identify the tasks needed to accomplish the objectives and plan the budget effectively. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 300-301.)

After the objectives and the budget next step is to develop the message. The message should be planned so that it will reach the target audience. There are three steps in creating the message: message generation, message evaluation and selection, and the message execution. Message generation starts by knowing your target audience and the kind of message they will respond to. The advertiser should conduct marketing research to determine which appeal works best with the audience. Then several alternative messages (appeals, themes, motifs, ideas) should be planned to get the desired response from the audience. After this the best message is selected. The effective-

tiveness of the advertisement does not only depend on what is said but also how it is said. The selection of the correct media is important. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 540-541.)

The advertiser should think about different media options at the budgeting stage and the message planning stage. This is because some media are more costly than others and some are better at conveying different messages. The steps included when choosing media are: deciding on desired reach, frequency and impact; choosing among major media types; selecting specific media vehicles; deciding on media timing; deciding on geographical media allocation. Reach, frequency and impact mean to find the most cost-effective media to deliver the desired number and type of exposures to the target audience. To be able to choose the correct major media type (TV, newspaper, radio etc.) the advertiser must know the media habits of the target audience and which of the medium will most effectively reach the them. Selecting specific media vehicles is making choices within the media type. For instance, in which specific newspaper to advertise in or on which channel to run advertisements. The next step in media selection is timing. The advertiser must decide when the advertisements are shown and how often. The timing can be seasonal or continuous through the year. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 552.)

After the advertisement has been released the advertiser should measure its communication effect on the target audience's awareness, knowledge and preference. Also the sales effect could be measured. The communication-effect research, or the copy-testing as it is called, aims to determine whether an advertisement communicates effectively. The test should be performed before and after the advertisement-campaign. There are three kind of tests. One is to ask consumers questions about the advertisement, this is called the consumer feedback method. Second test is a portfolio test. In this test consumers are asked to view or listen to different advertisements. After that they are asked to recall the advertisements and their content. The test measures advertisements ability to stand out and reach the consumers. Lastly laboratory tests can be performed. These tests use equipment to measure consumer's physiological reactions and such. Laboratory tests can obtain information on the advertisements attention-getting power. The sales effect is easy to measure in direct marketing situations but hard in others. One way to measure sales is to compare sales data before and after the advertisement campaign. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 553-554.)

Sales promotion

Sales promotion is the stimulation of sales achieved through different incentive tools. These tools are mostly short-term such as contests, discounts, trade shows, games, give-a-ways, special offers and similar activities. (Business dictionary 2013. Date of retrieval 28.3.) Sales promotion can be used in various ways. There are three kinds of sales promotion. The one commonly used is consumer promotion which is for example handing out coupons to consumers or offering free trials. Other one is trade promotion that is when manufacturers offer incentives to retailers to sell or stock more of their products. The last one is business and sales force promotion in which the company promotes itself at trade fairs or offers incentives for the sales forces to sell more through a competition. As in advertising when using sales promotion the company must set objectives, select the proper tools, develop the program, execute it and evaluate the results. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 555, 569.)

Events & experiences

There are various reasons for companies to be involved with events. By sponsoring an event the companies can aim to identify with target market or lifestyle, they can increase the awareness of their brand and improve their image, and they can create experiences and feelings for the consumer's. Therefore consumer's may indirectly connect these feelings to the brand. Sponsoring events can improve the relationship with the sponsor's target market but only if managed properly. Successful sponsoring includes carefully choosing the events and designing effective event related marketing activities. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 562, 569.)

Public relations

According to Kotler and Fox (1985) public relations can be defined as: *“Public relations is the management function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an institution with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.”*

A public is any group that has an impact or interest in the company's ability to achieve its objectives. For example for a school its public would include students, teachers, staff and the community. Public relations is a marketing communication tool that aims to promote the organization's image and increase awareness of the organization with its publics. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 284.)

Public relations process has five steps:

1. Identifying the organization's relevant publics.
2. Measuring images and attitudes of the relevant publics toward the organization.
3. Establishing image and attitude goals for the key publics.
4. Developing cost-effective public relations strategies.
5. Implementing actions and evaluating results.

Organizations would like to have positive disposition from every public it affects or is affected by. But as public relations and marketing resources are limited it must identify its most important publics and focus on them. Often these relevant publics are the ones that the organization deals with on an active and continuous basis. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 284.)

Once the relevant publics have been identified the organization must assess each of the publics' attitude and feelings towards it. Regular contact with a specific public can obtain some idea of that public's attitude. However actual attitude can only be measured through a formal marketing research. This research can take a form of focus group discussion with members of relevant public or a widespread public opinion survey. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 285.)

Researching relevant publics' opinions should give the organization hard data about how these publics view it. The data can be arranged according to how much each public knows about the organization, what the attitude of those publics is and how important the specific publics are for the organization. By consulting the data the organization can then focus their public relations efforts to most important publics and points. (Kotler & Fox 1985, 285.)

Having identified the most pressing public relations issues and the organization's most important publics it is time to plan cost-effective public relations strategies. The organization should try to understand what are the causes for negative attitudes of its publics. After the causes have been analyzed it should plan actions to address these points. Tools to carry out these plans include publications (brochures, articles, videos), events (news conferences, seminars, exhibits), sponsorships (sponsoring sports or cultural events), news (creating favorable news about the organization), speeches (give talks at conferences), public service activities (contribute time and money to good causes), identity media (logos, stationery, business cards) (Kotler & Keller 2009, 568.)

These plans and projects cost time and money so the organization will need to find an optimum mix of cost-effective actions. (Kotler & Andreasen 1991, 578.)

As with every marketing communications tool the effects should be measured after the actions have been implemented. The easiest and most common way to measure public relations effectiveness is the number of exposures created in the media. This can mean for example how many lines of text have been written about the organization in newspapers and how many minutes of air time on television and radio it has received. However this way of measurement is not entirely satisfying. It does not give information how many consumer's actually saw, read or heard the message and what they thought about it. Better measurement tool would be to conduct an awareness and attitude survey before and after the public relations actions. (Kotler & Andreasen 1991, 589.)

Direct marketing

Kotler and Keller (2009) define direct marketing as “...use of mail, telephone, fax, e-mail or Internet to communicate directly with or solicit response or dialogue from specific customers and prospects.” It is a means to reach out to the customer without using marketing middlemen. Direct marketing includes direct mail, telemarketing, catalog marketing, websites, interactive TV, kiosks, and mobile devices. It enables the customer to place an order immediately. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 572.)

Benefits for this kind of marketing for the customers are its easy accessibility as orders can be placed from home through websites or telephones and they can have more time to browse through websites and catalogs. Benefits for the marketers are that they can easily segment their customers as they can buy mailing lists of different groups of people. This helps them to customize their messages to their target group and test different approaches. On the other hand direct marketing has some problems. Customers might be irritated of telemarketing calls at inconvenient times and telemarketers way of pushing the sale and taking advantage of impulsive buyers or the elderly. Additionally customers complain about misleading marketing and actual deceptions and frauds. Also the way direct marketers keep track of their customers buying behavior and mailing lists might be considered as invasion of privacy by some. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 573, 578.)

Interactive marketing

Interactive marketing is the newest marketing communications channel. It means online activities and programs to raise awareness, improve image or to sell products or services to customers and prospects. Interactive marketing consists of websites, microsites (individual pages supplementing the primary site), search ads (for example Google ads), display ads or banner ads (small boxes of text on websites), interstitials (advertisements that pop up between changes on a website), Internet-specific ads and videos (shared on sites like YouTube, Facebook etc.), sponsorships (sponsoring websites and content to raise awareness of the organization), alliances (websites and companies advertising each other), online communities (sponsoring online communities relevant to the organization's business to gain useful information from the members), e-mail (sending e-mail to the customers), and mobile marketing (sending text messages). (Kotler & Keller 2009, 578-585.)

Interactive marketing enables companies to tailor their messages to the consumers and engage them by considering their special interests. Also the interactions with the consumers can be easily traced as the advertisers can instantly see the data how many visitors click on an ad, how long they have spend at the website, where are they from, and so on. Likewise one advantage is contextual placement which enables advertisers to purchase ads on sites that are related to their business or advertise based on keywords typed on search engines. One major disadvantage is that consumers can effectively screen out most advertisements with software that blocks ads and email spam filters. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 578.)

Word of mouth marketing

Word of mouth marketing is oral, written or electronic communications that relate to the advantages or experiences of purchasing or using products or services. With social networks such as MySpace and Facebook word of mouth has become an important force in marketing. On these social networks and on other niche social networks people talk about dozens of brands daily. As word of mouth is generally considered more believable and trustworthy than other marketing channels the companies should pay attention to it. Positive word of mouth happens sometime on its own, but more often than not, it is managed. It can be encouraged through different publicity activities set up by companies or by encouraging consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-marketer communications. (Investopedia US, 2013, Date of retrieval 29.3) Word of mouth marketing includes buzz and viral marketing, opinion leaders and blogs. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 585.)

Buzz marketing and viral marketing both aim at generating high amounts of attention to present a brand and its features. Buzz marketing creates publicity and excitement about a brand through unexpected means. For example a blender manufacturer Blendtec created a video series called "Will it blend?" where they would blend different objects such as phones and pens with their blenders. It was very popular on YouTube and created a buzz. Viral marketing is internet marketing that spreads exponentially whenever a new user is added. The consumers are encouraged to spread company-developed materials such as video, audio or written materials online. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 586.) Viral marketing assumes that the advertisement will spread with each new user to everyone with whom that user interacts (Investopedia US, 2013, Date of retrieval 29.3)

Using opinion leaders means identifying influential individuals and organizations and devoting extra effort to them. These might be journalists, experts and generally people others tend to listen to. They influence and credibility therefore if they spread positive word of mouth people are likely to notice. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 588.)

Blogs are online journals and their role in word of mouth marketing is increasing in importance. Some are personal and others are able to reach and influence large audience. They bring together people with common interests. Blogs are also an outlet for consumers to voice their opinions and experiences, positive or negative, about companies, products or services. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 591.)

Personal selling

Personal selling is the process of salesperson interacting with a prospective customer with the purpose of making a sale. The salesperson aims to get to know the customer and assess the customer's needs and help the customer to achieve their goals with the products or services the salesperson offers. Personal selling helps the company to develop relationship with the customer through the salesperson and also the customer has a chance to associate a face with the product. In effect the salesperson acts as the company's personal link to the customer which can result in a positive or negative image of the company. Hence the sales force should be well trained and managed. (wiseGEEK 2013, Date of retrieval 29.3)

4. RESEARCH

The purpose of the thesis was to evaluate the marketing of Oulu University of Applied Sciences' international degree programmes. The main point was to map what influenced the applicants to select these programmes, how exposed the target groups were to the marketing and what media channels they use. Reason for this thesis was because the international degree programmes' do not attract enough Finnish and European students and students outside of Europe who apply to the programmes are often not eligible or unable to start their studies. The ratios for the programmes starting positions should be that half of the students are Finnish and other half foreigners. The aim of this research is to help improve international degree programmes' marketing efforts in the future to attract larger number of the desired applicants.

4.1 Research methodology

The research part of the thesis was conducted as a quantitative research in a survey form for the students participating in the entrance examinations held in Oulu 26 – 28.4.2012. The survey aims to map the level of attendees' exposure to the marketing activities of OUAS. Also it aims to map the media the attendees follow as to make marketing more precise and effective in the future.

Quantitative research is a formal, objective and systematic process in which numerical data is used to obtain information about the world. It asks questions in a structured way from large numbers of people which represent a sample of target market. Through this it can produce facts and statistics in a reliable way. (The Marketing Donut, 2013, Date of retrieval 29.3)

Quantitative research is usually in a survey form. The answers on a questionnaire can be closed or open-ended. Closed questions ask respondents to choose from a specific selection of answers. For example a health survey could ask "How often do you do physical exercise?" and the answers could be never, once a month, once a week, few times a week, daily. Open-ended questions let the respondents write freely. Example of an open-ended question would be "In your opinion how could the customer service be improved?" (The Marketing Donut, 2013, Date of retrieval 29.3.)

The author chose quantitative, questionnaire-based survey as it allows to examine large numbers of population members in a short period of time and the results can be systematically analysed. The questionnaire had closed questions and one open-ended question making the questionnaire semi-structured. Quantitative method was chosen over other methods as it was necessary to obtain data from a large group of people. In this case for example interviews would have been too time consuming.

4.2 Research implementation

After choosing the thesis topic, the author consulted with the commissioner about the thesis and research. The commissioner had planned the research to be conducted at the entrance examinations for the degree programmes. This set a specific date for the research. After this the author studied books about the topic of marketing communications and marketing of educational institutions. As the sample group for the research was to be the attendees at the entrance examinations a quantitative survey was the optimal method to obtain information as many of them as possible. The author met with the commissioner several times and the survey was designed cooperatively. The entrance examinations were held in Oulu 26 – 28.4.2012. The author set a table with pens and survey forms outside the entrance examination rooms and asked the attendees to fill the survey after they had finished their exams. After the data was gathered the results were typed in Excel-file and analysed. The tables shown in the following chapters are the data from this research.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

The number of students participating at the entrance examinations on 26 – 28.4.2012 was 90 out of which 89 students took the survey. By degree programmes the number of respondents were: Degree Programme in Information Technology 14 out of 14, Degree Programme in International Business 48 out of 49, and Degree Programme in Business Information Technology 27 out of 27. The number of respondents were higher than expected, almost 100% of the sample group. The data will be presented in frequency tables by degree programmes. Questions will be in order of appearance on the questionnaire-form. The question number 6 was an open-ended question. The answers for this question are not written word to word but are summarized.

5.1 Degree Programme in Information Technology

TABLE 1. Gender

Gender	Number of respondents
Male	12
Female	2

Majority of the applicants to the Degree Programme in Information Technology were males. This is not surprising as IT is traditionally a male-dominant field.

TABLE 2. Age

Age	Number of respondents
17	1
18	1
19	6
20	1
23	1

24	2
28	2

Most of the attendees were aged 19 but the age-scale was quite diverse. Possible reason for this might be that they have been working in the IT field and have later applied to get a higher degree in the field.

TABLE 3. Nationality

Nationality	Number of respondents
Finnish	8
Somalian	1
Nigerian	1
Lebanese	2
Russian	2

Most of the attendees were Finnish as the entrance examinations took place in Oulu. The foreigners participation in the exam might live in Finland or have traveled for the entrance exam.

4. In your opinion, which of the following had the most influence in your decision to apply to this degree programme? Select five most important ones and arrange them in order 1-5 (5 most influence, 1 little influence.) The importance was calculated by summing up all the points a specific answer choice got.

TABLE 4. Influences to apply to the degree programme

Answer choice	Importance
a) Reputation of the degree programme	16
b) The location of OUAS	33
c) Career opportunities	31
d) Internationality of the programme	28

e) Friends and/or family	28
f) I saw advertisements / marketing campaign of OUAS	2
g) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	11
h) Student counseling at high school / previous school	0
l) Exchange opportunities	11
j) Motivation / interest to study this field	50
k)Other reason	0

As can be seen from the table the most important influences for the applicants were in this order: motivation / interest to study this field, the location of OUAS, career opportunities, internationality of the programme, and friends and/or family.

5. Where did you find the information about OUAS and this degree programme? (Please, circle the ones where you found information.)

TABLE 5. Information sources

Answer choice	Number of respondents
a) Facebook	1
b) Newspaper (City, Six Degrees, Forum24)	1
c) Google advertisements	0
d) The website of OUAS	11
e) Brochures	1
f) Study fairs	2
g) Studies in English -brochure delivered home	2
h) Friends and family	5
i) Student counselor	2
j) OUAS web magazine Extra	0
k) Find Your Match -campaign website	0

l) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	2
m) Other: admissions.fi	1

The main source of information for the applicants seems to have been the website of OUAS. The second most reported choice was friends and family. None of the respondents seem to have picked up on the Google advertisements, OUAS web magazine Extra, or the Find Your Match - campaign website which was created to promote OUAS international degree programmes.

6. Your feedback and/or development ideas for marketing of OUAS international degree programmes:

Feedback advised to be more visible in social networks and to make brochures more available in different public buildings.

5.2 Degree Programme in International Business

TABLE 1. Gender

Gender	Number of respondents
Male	16
Female	32

There were twice as many female as male attendees at the entrance exam. Females seem to be more drawn to international business than to IT.

TABLE 2. Age

Age	Number of respondents
17	1
18	8
19	16
20	9

21	3
22	3
23	5
27	1
30	1

Majority of the applicants were aged 18 to 20 as they have likely finished high school. There were also surprisingly many older applicants.

TABLE 3. Nationality

Nationality	Number of respondents
Finnish	45
Russian	2
USA	1

Vast majority of the attendees were Finnish. However this does not mean that a small number of foreigners applied but just that they were not able attend the entrance exam in Oulu.

4. In your opinion, which of the following had the most influence in your decision to apply to this degree programme? Select five most important ones and arrange them in order 1-5 (5 most influence, 1 little influence.) The importance was calculated by summing up all the points a specific answer choice got.

TABLE 4. Influences to apply to the degree programme

Answer choice	Importance
a) Reputation of the degree programme	48
b) The location of OUAS	99
c) Career opportunities	117
d) Internationality of the programme	100

e) Friends and/or family	30
f) I saw advertisements / marketing campaign of OUAS	3
g) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	15
h) Student counseling at high school / previous school	8
l) Exchange opportunities	99
j) Motivation / interest to study this field	86
k)Other reason	0

Based on this data the most influential factors for international business applicants were in this order: career opportunities, internationality of the programme, location of OUAS, exchange opportunities, and motivation / interest to study this field. Compared to the results from degree programme in information technology similarities and also some differences can be seen. Respondents from both groups are highly influenced by career, internationality and the location. Differences are that IT applicants were more influenced by motivation / interest to study, and friends and/or family than business applicants. On the other hand business applicants were more influenced by exchange opportunities than IT applicants.

5. Where did you find the information about OUAS and this degree programme? (Please, circle the ones where you found information.)

TABLE 5. Information sources

Answer choice	Number of respondents
a) Facebook	3
b) Newspaper (City, Six Degrees, Forum24)	1
c) Google advertisements	5
d) The website of OUAS	39
e) Brochures	9
f) Study fairs	5
g) Studies in English -brochure delivered home	2

h) Friends and family	13
i) Student counselor	6
j) OUAS web magazine Extra	0
k) Find Your Match -campaign website	0
l) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	15
m) Other: school	1

As before the main source of information seems to have been the OUAS website. Other main sources of information seem to have been friends and family, and Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites. All in all the sources of information were quite varied. None of the respondents selected OUAS web magazine Extra, and Find Your Match -campaign website as sources of information.

6. Your feedback and/or development ideas for marketing of OUAS international degree programmes:

Majority of the feedback suggested more advertising of the programmes at high schools and vocational schools and also to use more internet advertising and social media. Also more information about exchange opportunities and international partners of OUAS was requested.

5.3 Degree Programme in Business Information Technology

TABLE 1. Gender

Gender	Number of respondents
Male	18
Female	9

Information technology generally seems to draw more male than female applicants.

TABLE 2. Age

Age	Number of respondents
18	5
19	7
20	8
21	2
23	1
25	1
26	1
32	1
36	1

The age scale is varied however most of the applicants are aged 18 to 20. Most of the applicants likely apply after high school.

TABLE 3. Nationality

Nationality	Number of respondents
Finnish	21
Russian	1
Moldovan	1
Cameroon	1
British	1
Taiwan	1
Vietnam	1

Most of the applicants are Finnish as the entrance examinations were held in Oulu. The foreigners attending might be living in Finland.

4. In your opinion, which of the following had the most influence in your decision to apply to this degree programme? Select five most important ones and arrange them in order 1-5 (5 most influence, 1 little influence.) The importance was calculated by summing up all the points a specific answer choice got.

TABLE 4. Influences to apply to the degree programme

Answer choice	Importance
a) Reputation of the degree programme	12
b) The location of OUAS	55
c) Career opportunities	72
d) Internationality of the programme	79
e) Friends and/or family	27
f) I saw advertisements / marketing campaign of OUAS	3
g) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	12
h) Student counseling at high school / previous school	8
l) Exchange opportunities	46
j) Motivation / interest to study this field	68
k)Other reason	0

The most influential factors for degree programme in business information technology were in this order: internationality of the programme, career opportunities, motivation / interest to study this field, the location of OUAS, and exchange opportunities. Even though the order of the influencing factors change the factors remain mostly the same for all programmes.

5. Where did you find the information about OUAS and this degree programme? (Please, circle the ones where you found information.)

TABLE 5. Information sources

Answer choice	Number of respondents
----------------------	------------------------------

a) Facebook	1
b) Newspaper (City, Six Degrees, Forum24)	2
c) Google advertisements	0
d) The website of OUAS	16
e) Brochures	3
f) Study fairs	1
g) Studies in English -brochure delivered home	1
h) Friends and family	7
i) Student counselor	6
j) OUAS web magazine Extra	0
k) Find Your Match -campaign website	1
l) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	6
m) Other: koulutusnetti (website)	1

Most of the respondents found information on the website of OUAS. Other sources of information were friends and family, student counselor and Guide for Applicants –brochure and/or websites.

6. Your feedback and/or development ideas for marketing of OUAS international degree programmes:

Feedback suggested to promote more how the degree programmes can help students in the future job market. For example if graduates of the programmes have been hired by reputable companies.

6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter the main research questions will be answered, and theory and research results compared and conclusions drawn. Additionally improvement suggestions for the OUAS international degree programmes' marketing will be given.

The main research questions were:

- How effective the current marketing campaign has been in attracting applicants from desired segments?
- What factors are relevant for the desired segments when choosing education?
- How to improve international programmes' marketing in the future to reach set goals?

According to the theory the effectiveness of a marketing campaign can be best measured by opinion and/or awareness surveys before and after the campaign. This survey was performed after the campaign and there was no survey before it. So the effectiveness cannot be measured as accurately as the theory recommends. However valuable information can still be gained from this survey and this survey can serve as a benchmark in the future.

When considering the campaign target groups most of the respondents were part of those groups. This is obviously because the examinations were held in Oulu and Finnish applicants was one of the target groups. Only three of the foreigners attending at the examinations were from target countries.

What comes to the marketing channels all of them except web magazine Extra have been used to some extent by the respondents. Out of 89 respondents the numbers for the channels are:

Answer choice	Number of respondents
a) Facebook	5
b) Newspaper (City, Six Degrees, Forum24)	4
c) Google advertisements	5
d) The website of OUAS	66

e) Brochures	13
f) Study fairs	8
g) Studies in English -brochure delivered home	5
h) Friends and family	25
i) Student counselor	14
j) OUAS web magazine Extra	0
k) Find Your Match -campaign website	1
l) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	23
m) Other:	3

As can be seen clearly most of the information has been found from the website of OUAS. Second is friends and family which is an important and credible source of information as well as an important influence when choosing a study place. Third one is Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or website. Although the campaign marketing channels have been used to find information they generally do not rank highly. Reason for this might be that the respondents do not specifically remember different campaign channels they have seen as the campaign was set a few months before the entrance examinations. Another reason might be that although they have seen web banners of international degree programmes and links to Find Your Match -campaign website on the main OUAS site they have selected the main site as their source of information disregarding the others. Still 66 out of 89 reported using OUAS website as a source of information and therefore rest of the respondents found their information from other marketing channels. This means that the other marketing efforts did indeed reach some of the respondents.

According to the survey the marketing campaign seems to have reached its target groups and while several channels gained little awareness from respondents the channels still managed to reach some of them. Based on this research the marketing campaign seems to have been efficient. However the research can only give information about the applicants (mainly Finnish) who attended the entrance examinations in Oulu. There were many foreign applicants who did the entrance examinations in their home countries.

The commissionaire set criteria for the campaign by which to evaluate the effectiveness. According to them the effectiveness was to be measured by: number of visitors to the campaign website, the number of clicks and views of banner-ads and search engine ads, number of applicants and students who accept the study place by country. According to the commissionaire the internet marketing efforts have been effective as they have received millions of views and hundreds of clicks.

The author received statistics about the applicants and their nationalities from the commissionaire. For the BIT programme the numbers are following: the number of total applicants was 646 out of which 134 were considered eligible. 44 applicants were accepted out of which 36 took the offered study place. Out of these 36 who took the study place the nationalities were 10 Finnish, 7 Vietnamese, 6 Chinese, 4 Nigerian, 3 Pakistan, 1 British, 1 Iranian, 1 Mexican, 1 Nepalese, 1 Taiwanese and 1 Russian. Compared to the goals the criteria is not met. Less than half are Finnish and from other target countries (China, Russia, Britain) there are total of eight people.

For the DIT programme the numbers are: 709 total applicants out of which 175 were considered eligible. 30 applicants were approved out of which 29 accepted the study place. The nationalities are: 9 Vietnamese, 8 Nepalese, 3 Chinese, 2 Lebanese, 1 Bulgarian, 1 Ethiopian, 1 Iranian, 1 Tansanian, 1 Hungarian, 1 Russian and 1 Finnish. Again comparing to the goals the criteria is not met. There is only one Finnish student when the goal was that half the starting students are Finnish. Out of 29 only six are part of the target group the campaign aimed to attract.

For DIB the numbers are: Total number of applicants was 654 out of which 279 were eligible. Total of 50 students were approved out of which 44 accepted the study place. The nationalities for those who accepted were 26 Finnish, 8 Nepalese, 5 Vietnamese, 1 Bangladesh, 1 Ghana, 1 Kazakhstan, 1 Nigerian and 1 Togo. More than half of the starting class is Finnish but there are no foreigners from the target countries.

The goals were to attract more Finnish students and students from target countries. Based on these statistics the goals are not met or are only partially met. Also the number of eligible students was low compared to the number of total applicants.

Second research question was: What factors are relevant for the desired segments when choosing education?

Based on the theory choosing education can be thought of as a buying process. Steps in the buying process are need arousal, information gathering, decision evaluation, decision execution and post-decision assessment. Educational institutions can affect the buying decision throughout this process with the help of marketing communications tools.

In the need arousal stage educational institutions can affect the external triggering factors. External factors can be for example a friend, teacher or parent, or advertisements and brochures. In this stage the school benefits from word of mouth marketing and advertising. A satisfied student studying at the educational institution might recommend the school to friends and family members. Also if the school knows its target groups' needs and wants the advertisements are likely to create interest in the future applicants as they cater to their specific needs.

The next stage in the buying process is information gathering. The future applicants look for information about different colleges and programs that are available. In this stage the school benefits from word of mouth marketing and good overall marketing efforts so that the information is easy to find and comprehensive. Also as internet is widely used to find information interactive marketing could be emphasized.

Once enough information has been gathered students need to evaluate colleges which best fulfill their needs and wants. It is done by narrowing down choices one by one until the most suitable one is left. In this stage the school cannot do much to influence the applicant's decision. What counts are the marketing communications efforts and how well the message has reached and influenced the target group.

After this the decision is executed and the students will apply to colleges based on their evaluations. Even when the students have been accepted and have started their studies they still evaluate the school whether it meets their expectations or not. Those who are not satisfied may drop out and apply for a different college which meets their wants. To minimize dissatisfaction the school must be able to offer the quality programs it has advertised. Programs of high quality and satisfied students are the basis of good marketing for educational institutions.

When combining answers from all the survey respondents following table can be created:

Answer choice	Importance
a) Reputation of the degree programme	76
b) The location of OUAS	187
c) Career opportunities	220
d) Internationality of the programme	207
e) Friends and/or family	85
f) I saw advertisements / marketing campaign of OUAS	8
g) Guide for Applicants -brochure and/or websites	38
h) Student counseling at high school / previous school	16
l) Exchange opportunities	156
j) Motivation / interest to study this field	204
k)Other reason	

According to the research most important influences were in this order: career opportunities, internationality of the programme, motivation / interest to study this field, the location of OUAS, and exchange opportunities. However things to notice here are that exchange opportunities were more important for international business students than for either of the information technology students. Also information technology students ranked friends and family as high influence.

So based on this the factors which influence the respondents most are internationality, career opportunities, interest to study the field and location of OUAS. They were interested in Oulu as a place, studying their respective field in an international environment, and career possibilities after graduation. Also exchange opportunities, and friends and family played a influential role in their decision to apply.

The last research question was: How to improve international programmes' marketing in the future to reach set goals?

To improve marketing the theory suggest designing a message that the target group responds to and using channels which will reach the target group. Also if possible it suggests to segment the market and use target marketing on the most desirable segments.

According to the research it seems that the applicants for the international programmes respond to international environment, interest in their respective fields, location of the school and career opportunities. By designing a message that emphasizes these facts and also mentions exchange opportunities, the target group will be likely to respond positively.

However things to note here are that not just any target group will respond to these attributes. Rather the applicants who respond to these attributes form a segment of internationally-minded people. The school might try to segment its market using psychographic segmentation. This type of segmentation divides people by their lifestyle and personality. The school could focus on segments that are or want to be more international. These might be students of international high schools, people who like to travel, and people who like to study different languages.

The channel to emphasize would be the main OUAS website. Also interactive marketing in general should be focused on. As mentioned before a website offering information about career possibilities after graduation would be worth considering.

Additionally to improve the marketing in the future and gain more information about the target segments the school could conduct a similar survey annually and also have focus group interviews with students already enrolled. These interviews would be a good way to gain information about their influences to apply, the level of satisfaction with the programmes, and their opinions and suggestions regarding to the programmes and marketing.

7. DISCUSSION

The objective of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of OUAS international degree programmes' marketing. The method used in the gathering of information was quantitative research method. The quantitative research was done by semi-structured survey and the sample group was the attendees at international degree programmes' entrance examinations in 2012. The information from this survey revealed the sample group's main influences to apply to the programmes and the main sources of information they used to find out about the programmes thus also evaluating the applicants' awareness of the marketing campaign.

The theoretical foundation of the thesis is based mainly on marketing publications from Philip Kotler, who is a leading marketing expert in the world. The theories have been developed over a long period of time and proven in practice around the globe. The theoretical foundation is reliable. The quantitative research method was the optimal choice for this type of research where data about a larger population needed to be gathered based on a smaller sample group. Author's opinion is that the sample group of the research offers a very good representation of the larger population. The questionnaire was able to obtain relevant information for the research. However it could have been designed in a better way. Question number four caused some confusion as some respondents misread the question or did not understand it completely. The question asked the respondents to select the five greatest influences to apply and rank them in order of influence. Better way might have been for example to ask the respondents circle answers from great influence to no influence. Also questions about gender and age might have been irrelevant. Additionally few interviews could have been conducted with students already studying at the school to find out more about their influences and reasons to select international programmes. These could have given more in-depth information to go with the statistical data. All in all, the author thinks that the research was reliable and was able to give useful information that will help the OUAS with future marketing efforts. If similar research will be conducted in the future this will serve as a good groundwork and basis for improving the research.

As mentioned in the Conclusion chapter the key to effective marketing is to design a message the target group responds to and use channels that are most likely to reach those groups. Also segmentation of the market could be considered to target marketing efforts better in the future. This research suggests to emphasize following factors in the message: international study environ-

ment, students' interest in their respective fields of study, location of the school and city of Oulu, exchange opportunities, and career opportunities after graduation. Recommended segments would be applicants who are or want to be more international. These might be for example students of international high schools. The main channel used to obtain information seems to have been the main OUAS website. Microsites, banners and a site offering information about career possibilities linked to this site would be worth considering.

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APPENDICES

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX 1

EVALUATING THE MARKETING OF THE OULU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES DEGREE PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS / BUSINESS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY / INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The objective of this survey is to evaluate the promotion of OUAS Degree Programme in International Business / Business Information Technology / Information Technology. Please, be so kind to take some time and fill in this questionnaire as the results can work as a guide to further developments. Additionally this survey serves the purposes of a final thesis. The questionnaire is anonymous.

1. Gender (please, circle your choice)

- a) Male
- b) Female

2. Age: _____

3. Nationality

- a) Finnish
- b) Other (please, specify) _____

4. In your opinion, which of the following had the most influence in your decision to apply to this degree programme? Select the five most important ones and arrange them in order 1-5 (5 most influence, 1 least influence)

- a) Reputation of the degree programme
- b) The location of OUAS
- c) Career opportunities
- d) Internationality of the programme
- e) Friends and/or family
- f) I saw advertisements / marketing campaign of OUAS
- g) Guide for Applicants –brochure and/or websites
- h) Student counseling at high school / previous school
- i) Exchange opportunities
- j) Motivation / interest to study this field
- k) Other reason: _____

5. Where did you find information about OUAS and this degree programme? (Please, circle the ones where you found information)

- a) Facebook
- b) Newspaper (City, Six Degrees, Forum24)
- c) Google advertisements
- d) The website of OUAS
- e) Brochures
- f) Study fairs
- g) Studies in English –brochure delivered home
- h) Friends and family
- i) Student counselor
- j) OUAS web magazine Extra
- k) Find Your Match –campaign website
- l) Guide for Applicants –brochure and/or websites
- m) Other: _____

6. Your feedback and/or development ideas for marketing of OUAS international degree programmes: