Direct Marketing and Strategies for Promoting Romanian Education to European Standards

[Marketingul direct și strategiile de promovare a învățământului românesc la standardele europene]

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Abstract: Aligning with the European standards implies open-mindedness. Without a cultural base which keeps us deeply connected to what is happening both in the East, and in the West, it would be rather hard to understand the easy way our country interacts with other countries. As a national state or as a company, disregarding the existence of Globalization and being out of this process means being sentenced to isolation and stagnation. We emphasize the role of our own effort within the framework of developing and transition countries. Alongside our integration in EU, several changes occurred and still do in all fields of activity, including in the educational one. In conclusion, direct marketing through promotional techniques can ensure education on a bottom-line basis in the European Union and beyond.

Keywords: *marketing; education; promotion strategies; globalization; promotional mix.*

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Introduction

Promotion is an element belonging to promotional mix which plays a great part in making efficient the activity of the economic agent. It is used in all sectors of national economy: primary sector, secondary, tertiary, quaternary and even for promoting knowledge-based economy.

In the tertiary sector, especially within the framework of educational services based on the premises of fast declining birthrate, as well as the accentuation of population mobility, it is necessary to create a marketing department within the organization chart of educational institutions, thus aligning with the requests of EU member states.

This department stipulates main financial resources required for implementing the active educational system aligned with European standards, suggests modern didactic techniques to call pupils attention, develops partnership networks with labor force market in order to conform to the economic requests, but also suggests promotion strategies (Balaure, 2000: 187) for maximizing the impact of the educational institution on the cultural level of future graduates.

As for knowledge phase, there are no standardized manuals to provide for a standard definition of marketing as part of education. Marketing strategy is adjusted according to specializations, to the origin of the target segment, the location of the high-school, the purchasing power, the families' living standard, the extent of the development of the community. The promotion strategy adopted by each college varies.

The educational service in terms of economic efficiency comprises all specializations which are placed at pupil's disposal. The education service can reach this level by reflecting main indicators of educational efficiency in mass-media only after the potential pupil was told about the existence of a new specialization, new skills and the possibility of correlating them with the labor force market. Pupils' level of information depends on the manner of communications within the educational establishment and within-family and on the feedback on this relationship.

At present, when both the complexity of specializations and the market structure request fast development, it is very important that the educational service provider explained to potential pupils the requisite data for the chosen specialization, the advantages offered by this specialization and, on the other hand, perceives their reactions which are genuine sources of information for future activity.

Continual communication between the educational institution and pupils is necessary, due to the fact that accurate and prompt information stimulates demand, directs it towards certain specializations and influences the number of pupils, bringing about changes in potential pupils conceptions and attitudes, which can be seen likely to raise their number and, on this basis the institution's image - the most important aspect for the educational institution - improves.

The main communication activity of the educational establishment is represented by the promotional mix, which consists in the specific combination of publicity instruments, in promoting the image of the high-school through the agency of teaching stuff and public relations. For communication to have a great impact, not only the whole marketing mix of the high-school (department, pupils, relations with supervising institutions), that is the promotion, but also the educational service has to be coordinated so as to ensure a complete spread of information and feedback, for knowing whether it was valued or not.

We consider that the marketing communication system could establish the general framework within which promotion can be conducted (promotional mix) through three promotional instruments: advertising, promoting the educational institution's image through the teaching stuff and, public relations which aim at promoting the educational institution, its specializations, making aware pupils and increasing the number of those who choose this institution as to improve the image of the educational establishment.

Communication implies: educational services, the acquisition price of stationery products and manuals, the target (the pupil) and the promotion.

Promotion implies: advertising, public relations, promoting the image through the agency of the teaching stuff.

Publicity: advertisement, free publicity.

Advertisement implies: advertising.

Promotion as one of the most empirical domains of marketing actions (Kotler, 1998: 127) is an ensemble of informational actions and instruments meant to draw potential pupils to educational institutions, to help them choose the right specialization according to labor market demand by creating a favourable image as to maximize the number of pupils, students in terms of available resources.

As a form of communication (Sălăvăștru, 2004: 178) it is used to inform, persuade or remind the public about the utilized educational services: the image of the educational establishment, the involvement of a person or of a nongovernmental organization which carries on an activity

inside the educational establishment within the community. Promotion often has a decisive role in the process of accomplishing the objectives set.

It is often spoken of the economy of knowledge, of the industrialization of education, of the market formation. On the impetus of the new information technologies, the capital liberalization, educational fields are also influenced by several structural and procedural fundamental transformations (Cucoș, 2000: 56).

In modern world's market economy, the quality of the specializations provided by an institution is less important, because if pupils don't know about their existence there are low chances that the available positions for a certain specialization get filled. According to tradition, promotion aimed at attracting new pupils. Nowadays, through promotion there are presented the advantages of a certain specialization, the opportunities to get a good job which persuade pupils opting for the most suitable specialization. Therefore, we can assert that modern promotion will stimulate, develop and guide pupils' needs. At present, nobody doubts about the necessity to promote educational services, a fact that is mirrored by the structure of the marketing mix where promotion plays a very important part. The more flexible and innovative the promotion activity, the bigger its impact upon a market saturated with advertising messages.

Promotion as a manifestation of actions, ways and methods used for professional orientation, informing and persuading pupils to choose a particular specialization for the purpose of accomplishing one's own goals, but also for ensuring the maximization of pupils' number/ good results in national competitions, is essential for achieving the educational institution's objectives, for extending higher education and for annihilating the effects of those actions that cause the decrease in the number of pupils.

Hence, the modern meaning of the word suggests a complex concept because:

- It is a form of communication which focuses on the promotional mix and has a larger sphere of activity than publicity;
- Reacts to rapid and direct change in demand (acceleration, increase, adjustment);
- Reacts to immediate change in pupils' behavior;
- Aims at having a positive and temporary offer for pupils.

Promotion is considered an ensemble of marketing techniques or marketing practices, actions or forms of communication which aim at surpassing a certain level of demand by turning pupils' attention and

attracting them, informing them and creating positive attitudes toward the educational establishment.

It has two main directions:

1. Promoting educational services by developing several positive attitudes towards the educational establishment through the agency of all instruments and methods utilized for professional orientation and for informing pupils about the latest specializations.

2. Maximizing the number of pupils through a series of actions and calling for (potential) pupils' attention. It is achieved through various types of activities, called promotional instruments or forms such as: advertising, public relations and direct promotion.

If we take into account the way of carrying on promotional activities, we distinguish:

- Promotional activities realised through mass-media (advertising);

- Promotional activities implemented within the educational establishment (direct promotion);

If we refer to the initiator of promotional activities, we notice:

- Active promotion – when the educational service provider is the one who takes the responsibility for promoting among pupils as to stimulate their preference for a given specialization;

- Passive promotion – when the teaching staff in the popularization team takes the responsibility for the methods and the techniques used for promotion.

The manager entrusted with the responsibility of the promotional domain will be choosing the forms, the methods and the techniques, when and how to use them (Kotler, Cox, 1984: 194).

Over the last decade there has been noticed an increase in the pursuits of promoting educational services, especially alongside our country's integration in the European Union. This led to the development of the role of promotion among marketing activities and consequently to the diversification of promotional objectives.

The use of promotion within the marketing mix is favoured by:

- a favourable evolution of the demand;
- an obvious variance of specializations;
- hidden qualities of specializations;
- emotional reasons which affect the option for a certain high-school;
- the availability of suitable funds.

The manager is able to define the promotional objectives each time and to lay down the promotional techniques which are to be used for reaching the goals.

The most used promotional techniques are:

- placing the location where pupils study in the best building;
- the development of a material structure that corresponds to curricular requests;
- the possibility to serve lunch for pupils inside the school;
- school has got material and temporal resources for extracurricular activities which help pupils develop both their creative and sporting abilities;
- the educational institution offers facilities for pupils with very good results in learning and in competitions, such as vacations either for relaxation or for learning new content;
- pupils with deficiency on assimilation of knowledge are given a stronger impetus to learn by co-opting them in an additional training program where learning techniques are adjusted to their rhythm of learning, their way of learning and also to their personal skills;
- gifted pupils benefit from complex educational programs that allow them to acced to institutions according to their aims and their personal skills.

It is very important for every educational establishment take into consideration the fact that there should be certain limits to carry on promotional activities, for they have also negative effects on economy (they are expensive) and in the long term, they materialize through market share decline (if promotion is not adapted to market conditions) and to speed up competition is beyond bearable limits.

The typology of promotional strategies

Unless we elaborate an adequate strategy in the promotional field as part of the marketing strategy, we can't achieve the objectives set.

Speciality literature comprises two types of promotional strategies (Prutianu, Munteanu, Caluschi, 2004: 154) adapted to educational services:

1. Push strategy implies adapting the educational service to pupils' learning capacity, to parents and local communities and impelling educational institutions to attract more pupils. The higher institution (the Ministry of Education and Research) particularly uses regulations, while the agent (high-schools) uses publicity to promote specializations.

2. Pull strategy refers to pupils and their family, their demands and expectations. Consumers (pupils, parents) request the product (educational service) and "pull" it through the delivery channel (school activities).

The promotional mix

The promotional mix that all high-schools should establish involves combining the methods and techniques used within the framework of the promotional activity and coordinating them as to fulfil the marketing objectives (Prutianu, Munteanu, Caluschi, 2004: 182) as set. The three constituents of promotional mix are: publicity, promotion (through the teaching staff) and public relations.

Factors which have an influence on the promotional mix

When choosing the promotional instruments (at some point they will be interdependent) which make up the promotional mix, one should take into account that:

- the type of specialization has an influence on giving priority to various forms of promotion. Thus, advertisement is very important for secondary school; the institution can be promoted by well-known teachers or graduates who have a successful career;
- the marketing strategy (Munteanu, 2006: 5) used has an impact on the combination of the forms of promotion;
- pupils' level of knowledge that influences them to study at a particular institution. Thus, in the phase of awareness and cognition, publicity and public relations play a major part and, in the next phase the promotion through the agency of the teaching staff;
- the life-cycle of the specialization changes the place and the role of the promotional instruments. Hence, when launching a new specialization, it is necessary to spread messages regarding the standards of competence in order to inform pupils. Once the objectives fulfilled, promotion is seen in all its forms, yet, in the phase of decline, public relations are no longer used and then reminder advertising plays a prominent part.

The components of the promotional mix are:

- promoting school's image through the teaching staff;
- public relations;
- publicity.
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Promoting school's image through the teaching staff

A promotional instrument which has recorded a great success rate so far and which has managed to amortize costs faster than publicity is the promotion of institution's image, an activity that involves offering facilities so pupils can make their choice immediately with respect to accredited specializations which are the most sought.

It is intended to increase the pupils' number who react promptly to stimuli, because stimuli catch attention by offering precise and clear information, arouse interest and generate emotions by offering persuasive elements.

The promotion of institution's image gives an extra stimulus to pupils through grants system, local regulation acts and the high-school's material basis. Attracting pupils from the countryside is accomplished by the popularization commission whilst attracting pupils from urban environment is realized through organizing educational fairs (spreading leaflets, brochures, showing documentary films) where pupils and teachers are invited to take part.

Direct promotion objectives are mainly demand-oriented.

a. Promotion oriented towards potential pupils aims at:

- increasing pupils' number on the short term;
- occupying a stable place on the market;
- persuading pupils to choose that particular educational institution;
- keeping pupils from competing high-schools at a distance;
- being on good terms with the families of graduates.

These objectives are fulfilled by offering some facilities to the target segment that are connected to budget configuration.

b. Promotion oriented towards institutions in the rural environment (alloted to the main high-school) can be realised through:

- specialization's advantages, by analysing if it corresponds with the region-specific labor market;
- the cut in the target segment's transportation costs;
- the target segment deals with well-known trainers in that region;
- implementing some social projects as to determine pupils to involve in activities within the institution, as well as in their residential area.

c. Promotion oriented towards trainers aims at:

- giving support for new subjects in the curricular area;
- facilitating the access to specialization courses.

Promotion is realised through bonuses, gifts, merit salaries, merit marks.

Lately, promoting the image has become very popular owing to its advantages: attracting pupils as it offers a rating rise by achieving notable personal feat, maintaining loyalty, arousing interest, attracting more institutions which want to be allotted, efficiency on the short term, flexibility.

It also has some disadvantages: temporary effects, lack of continuity.

Choosing the right instruments for promoting the image is very important, taking into consideration the fact that they are diversified. The most frequently used instruments are: student portfolios, promotional gifts offered at various national holidays or feast days, gifts in recognition of competences, good results in competitions and contests, sports games, tombolas, selling souvenirs for charity purposes.

The team responsible for promotion will elaborate a strategy which implies using the most efficient instruments.

Public relations

The success of an educational institution depends to a great extent on its relations with pupils, NGOs, local communities, banks, investors, mass-media etc.

This form of promotion has informative nature; in fact, it is a communication form, personalized and adequate, expressing a unique, credible message. PR spreads information through: speakers, press conferences, publicity materials, special events related to sponsorship and donations.

Public relations implies dialog and gets closer to those people who reject advertising and its forms. Editorial activities are very efficient and the costs are lower than other forms of publicity.

The disadvantage of using public relations is that messages are short-lived and there is no control over their content. Main PR channels are:

- press relations (for extracurricular activities);
- communication on the occasion of a symposium or a project launch;
- support for noble causes (for children with serious ailments);
- sponsorship (to monasteries, calamity-stricken communities, disadvantaged people);
- public services.

The following objectives are to be taken into consideration:

- promoting good will (it is a function which helps creating an image which is favourably reflected; public relations are rendered evident);
- promoting a product or a service (PR helps increasing the number of people aware of the activities carried on within the educational institution through press releases or events. Thus, famous colleges would distribute press releases whenever there are available specializations on the education market);
- preparing internal communication strategies as to clear up rumors among employees and within the local community;
- the attempts to counter negative ads by controlling the unfavourable impact of ads;
- organizing lobby groups to help the college carry on negotiations with representatives of the government who monitor legislation.

To gain control over the market, public relations involves:

- distributing press releases to generate positive publicity. Promotion through the teaching staff is made by the medium of press releases that point out good results in competitions, contests, local extracurricular activities, educational projects with local impact;
- press articles and audio-video media articles about several events organized within the educational institution;
- information letters - to inform the employees of events that have a positive impact.

A good public relations strategy is key to implementing the public institution's three main objectives: increasing the number of pupils, increase in income and trust share.

The structure of the strategy is reflected in the way the 'popularization' team is organized, on the grounds of location, pupils and specializations.

The basis of public relations implies supporting for promotion agents by following all stages to recruit them: training, payment, stimulation and assessment of the activity carried on by the trainers involved.

Publicity

Publicity is the form of promotion (Balaure, Adăscăliței, Balan, Catoi, Olteanu, Pop, & Teodorescu, 2000: 176), represented by a system of activities which aims at promoting the specializations which are essential for the

professional training or are meant to develop positive attitudes towards a concept, an action or theory and to determine pupils to choose them.

Unlike promotion, publicity makes a product become popular and well-known, changes the institution's image, is abstract, but it aims at offering best services, attracting pupils; also, it contributes to fulfilling the objectives. Publicity is different from advertisement; the latter is just one of publicity's components in point of quantity, quality and structure. Free publicity is carried out through information broadcast which leads to increasing pupils' confidence in the chosen specialization, increasing the educational organization's prestige through the agency of: conferences, articles, reports, posters.

Publicity forms can be applied through specific instruments, which have become publicity methods and publicity techniques. They are diverse and the most commonly used are: ads, posters, catalogues, logos, radio, television, cinema, exhibitions, fairs (Meghișan, Nistorescu, 1998: 102).

Choosing the most adequate techniques and methods is of great importance, as well as their harmonious joining so that publicity could reduce the psychological distance between the educational service provider and the pupil. Hence, publicity should transmit messages connected to pupil's desires and to sway them to search for information; advertisement plays a major part in this activity.

Therefore, without the cultural base which keeps Romanians deeply connected to what happens in the East, but also in the West, it would be rather hard to understand the easy way they interact with foreigners. These qualities may represent the premises for partnerships in all activity fields on the European space, as Romanians could become mediators and stability factors in the region, insofar as they want to protect their values by negotiating future partnership arrangements.

Conclusions

On the impetus of the new information technologies, the capital liberalization, educational fields are also influenced by several structural and procedural fundamental transformations.

Over the last decade there has been noticed an increase in the pursuits of promoting educational services, especially alongside our country's integration in the European Union. This led to the development of the role of promotion among marketing activities and consequently to the diversification of promotional objectives.

The promotional mix that all high-schools should establish involves combining the methods and techniques used within the framework of the

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Lately, promoting the image has become very popular owing to its advantages: attracting pupils as it offers a rating rise by achieving notable personal feat, maintaining loyalty, arousing interest, attracting more institutions which want to be allotted, efficiency on the short term, flexibility.

The success of an educational institution depends to a great extent on its relations with pupils, NGOs, local communities, banks, investors, mass-media etc.

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