

Marketing Strategies In Vietnamese Universities

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Summary: The application of marketing tools such as websites, search engine optimization (SEO), social media, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems is gaining traction among universities in Vietnam to enhance their competitive capabilities and attract students.

Keywords: Marketing, universities, enhancement.

1. Introduction

For major universities worldwide, brand strength has become a vital factor for survival and growth. How do universities in Vietnam compare? The concept of a university brand - don't wait for it to happen naturally. Many Vietnamese universities currently focus primarily on their core mission of education and training to equip students with knowledge, without giving much attention to branding. This traditional viewpoint suggests that the university environment is academic and should not be overly business-oriented. However, this perspective is gradually shifting in the competitive landscape of today's universities, especially during the era of the Industry 4.0 revolution, which brings about significant changes. Education itself is a type of "service," and any type of service requires marketing efforts and image promotion. Alongside prioritizing quality, image marketing is gaining importance. Across the world, from prestigious institutions like Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge to smaller universities, each one has its own communication department. In India, university associations have established a separate Council of Communication and Public Relations to support and train communication officers in universities.

Attracting talented students, building brand reputation, and name recognition are crucial for the survival of Vietnamese universities, especially as they transition to self-enrollment and financial autonomy.

2. Content

2.1. University Marketing in Vietnam

While university admission used to be highly competitive with limited spots, the growing number of private universities, international collaboration programs, and top-tier international university partnerships has expanded students' choices. This also poses a challenge to public universities that hold the belief in "letting nature take its course." According to the latest report from HSBC titled "The Value of Education" and subtitled "Foundations for the Future," released in 2016, there were over 110,000 Vietnamese students studying in 47 countries globally, with an estimated annual cost of \$3 billion for their overseas education. Recognizing this demand, international universities started seeing Vietnam as a promising market. With internationally recognized degrees, English-medium programs, foreign instructors, shortened study periods, reasonable tuition fees, and opportunities for overseas study, international institutions immediately appeal to parents.

However, it's worth noting that international universities have an advantage in communication, especially in terms of budget. Public universities in Vietnam are gradually shifting towards developing communication strategies to attract students (partly due to the impact of financial autonomy). Communication efforts by universities have increased, including offering more scholarships to new students, organizing open day events for high school students to explore the university environment, and introducing additional international collaborative programs.

The application of digital marketing tools is becoming more widespread among Vietnamese universities to attract learners and cater to the needs of their student customers. Most universities in Vietnam have websites to provide information to current students and other interested parties about their activities. This is an essential tool for all types of universities (public and private alike). Table 1 illustrates the application of digital marketing tools in three Vietnamese universities: Foreign Trade University, Thang Long University, and RMIT Vietnam University. Through the compiled data in the table, it is evident that all three universities across different categories are adopting digital marketing strategies to enhance the quality of education. However, based on the case study of the three universities, public universities are less advanced in implementing technology, especially digital technology, in teaching, research, and development of new teaching methods.

2.2. Solutions for Enhancing Marketing Effectiveness in Universities

1. Developing a Marketing Communication Plan

To achieve desired marketing communication results, universities need to establish specific communication plans before executing their strategies. This involves following these steps [1]:

Step 1: Identify the target audience for communication. Accurately identifying the target audience is crucial for university decisions, as it influences activities, message content, and communication channels. The university's target audience should align with its marketing communication objectives. For instance, if the goal is to inform first-year students about available university products, the target audience is the first-year students.

Step 2: Determine the level of audience knowledge. Universities must assess what the target audience already knows about their activities and products, as well as their needs. For example, the university might realize that first-year students have limited awareness of the products offered by the university.

Step 3: Choose appropriate communication channels. Based on the target audience's habits and preferences, universities should select suitable communication channels. Using the example mentioned earlier, since first-year students may have limited computer skills, the university could consider sending letters to classes or using student organizations to introduce its products.

Crafting and Designing the Message: Once the desired recipient's expectations are identified, universities should design a message. This process addresses content, structure, and message format. Content should highlight the benefits the recipient will gain. The structure should be logical and coherent. The message format should be engaging and visually appealing, as it will be conveyed through various communication channels. Using the example, the university could outline the message content to include the benefits of using university services and how to utilize them. The content should be presented in a clear, logical manner, with visually appealing elements to captivate the students' curiosity.

Collecting Feedback: After delivering the message, universities should evaluate its effectiveness by collecting feedback. This assessment involves determining whether recipients received the message, comprehended its content, and gauging their attitude toward the information received.

2. Utilizing a Variety of Marketing Communication Tools

Universities should diversify their marketing communication tools to cater to the varying habits, lifestyles, conditions, and study periods of their target audiences. Each group of investors at universities has unique habits and needs during different stages of their academic journey. Diversifying communication tools ensures that universities can effectively target all their investor groups.

Universities should not only rely on traditional communication channels such as announcements, posters, flyers, websites, and emails but also explore new avenues like participating in social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. Social media participation is easily achievable with a few simple steps, and information shared can quickly reach a wide audience. Some universities have started using social media for marketing communication, though the effectiveness requires careful research.

Developing communication through blogs is also effective since blogging has become familiar to people, especially students. If universities maintain blogs that act as personal pages to introduce themselves and their activities, they can establish a friendly connection with potential investors.

In some university dormitories, there are public announcement systems. Universities can collaborate with these departments to share information or promote their products through the

public address system. This approach is cost-effective, but it's only feasible in locations equipped with such systems.

3. Strengthening the Use and Effectiveness of Communication Tools

Advertising

Advertising within university activities involves introducing and disseminating information about the university's products and image to stimulate the use of products and services, enhance the university's reputation, and increase its competitive ability. Universities should focus on developing advertising through their website, posters, flyers, and newsletters, as these are forms of communication that many investors are interested in.

For websites: Emphasize the creation and regular use of the university's website to communicate with target investors. When designing the website, universities should include a section like "Ask the Librarian." Moreover, the staff in this department should make investors feel that the university is ready to answer any questions related to using its products. This section will reassure investors and make them feel supported whenever they use the university's products online. Timely guidance for investors not only enhances the effectiveness of online instructions but also encourages long-term product use.

Direct Marketing

According to the American Marketing Association, direct marketing is an interactive marketing system that uses one or more advertising media to induce a measurable response at any location. Specifically, direct marketing is a communication method universities use to approach target investors directly, using methods such as sending letters, making phone calls, etc., with the aim of encouraging the use of the university's products and services. Typically, universities tend to use direct mail methods to introduce their products to investors. There are two mailing methods: email and traditional mail. In today's context, sending email offers advantages due to its time-saving and efficient nature. Additionally, using email for information exchange has become more common among university investors. Universities can acquire investors' names and email addresses through the departments of organization and political affairs and student affairs. With this advantage, universities can easily send tailored emails to each investor. For student investors, when they begin their studies at the university, the university can send welcoming letters, introduce essential products, and recommend their usage. This gesture makes investors feel respected and valued by the university. Furthermore, universities should frequently send notifications and product usage suggestions when launching new offerings. For investor groups like managers, lecturers, and specialists who are fewer in number, universities can personalize letters with each investor's name. This practice allows investors to feel the university's genuine interest, leading them to pay more attention to the letter's content.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Fourth Industrial Revolution presents numerous opportunities for Vietnamese universities to transform their operations, not only in terms of service delivery methods, curriculum, and educational content but also by focusing on marketing activities to highlight their brands and reputation. This will enable Vietnamese universities to enhance competitiveness and expand their operations to other countries in the region and the world.

However, the development of Education 4.0 also poses significant challenges for universities, particularly public universities in Vietnam. These institutions are constrained by limited funding from the state budget and ethical and social barriers related to tuition fees and traditional beliefs.

Allowing some public universities in Vietnam, such as Foreign Trade University, to have more autonomy will partially alleviate limitations on investment capital. Nevertheless, for digital marketing to truly enhance competitive capacity, universities themselves need to adopt appropriate solutions.

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