

6 Steps to be Followed to Make Marketing Plan of a University

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Abstract

The study reveals 6 steps to make marketing plan of a university. There are many articles on university marketing. Majority of them are found on different specific aspects of the marketing of university. There is a research gap observed. None of the articles are found that offers a complete solution of marketing of a university. Marketing is not a single isolated activity rather it is an integrated effort. The 6 steps are identified to make a marketing plan of a university. First step is to determine who will be the prospective student of the university through market segmentation and market targeting. The second step is to analyze the competitors' positioning and 8 Ps strategies through 'Point of Parity (POP)', 'Point of Difference (POD)' and through SWOT analysis. After the first and second steps, the third step is to determine the positioning strategy of the university, and the programs. The fourth step is to determine the strategies for 8 Ps that is Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical Evidence, and Placement (can be incorporated as marketing mix of a university). After analyzing information and determining the strategies in the previous steps; university marketer will undertake the course of actions according to the strategies in the step five and implement it. The sixth step is to monitor the course actions that have been taken as the marketing programs are implemented in an intended way.

Keywords: University Marketing, 4 Ps, 7 Ps, 8 Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical Evidence, and Placement), Marketing Communication, Market Positioning, Point of Parity (POP), Point of Difference (POD), SWOT analysis

1. First step is to determine who will be the prospective student of the university through market segmentation and market targeting.

Many institution wants to cover every market at once and meet everyone's expectations. They do not manage to pinpoint their positioning or to eliminate or exclude certain specialties (Noir Sur Blanc, as cited in Hanover Research, 2014). Proper information is to be collected about the prospective students for whom the university designs its different programs to fulfill its mission, vision, and objectives. It is very much difficult for a university specially for a private university, to accommodate and satisfy heterogeneous student groups in terms of their quality as students, social class, financial ability, perceptions and objectives of higher education, etc. All kind of students should not be prospective for all programs and for all university. For example, the university may take low graded students for their different programs when the university should have the predetermined, trained and dedicated teaching forces, curriculum, and other facilities to ensure quality learning environment and to make the students life comfort. Facilities for different segment should be different as their perception of quality, objective of higher education, and ability of learning and investing is different. The marketer of the university has to be particular regarding those issues. Therefore, marketer will have to determine the segments of students will be their target, how they will be facilitated, and how they will serve themselves, their nation, and the world.

There is a notion that higher education opportunity should be limited to the good students. It is observed that many are known as poor graded students who are enabled themselves to explore in their students life. They have positioned themselves in the job markets whereas their batch mates who are entitled as good students are struggling. Many teachers would have the similar experience. But, it is of course to see whether the students have the minimum ability to cope up the difficulties of the program.

2. The second step is to analyze the competitors' positioning and 8 Ps strategies through 'Point of Parity (POP)', 'Point of Difference (POD)' and through SWOT analysis:

It is important to analyze the competitors' positioning and 8 Ps strategies through 'Point of Parity (POP)', 'Point of Difference (POD)' and through SWOT analysis to determine its positioning strategy and mission statement. University's mission statement may reflect positioning strategy of the university. If competitor universities have the distinct positioning strategy, then it is to see how their stake holders are perceiving the university, which kinds of students are taking admission in the competing university, and why. Marketers should find out the benefits in terms of 8 Ps which are being provided by competitors are similar to the own university that is the identification of Point of Parity (POP). On the other hand, marketers should also find out the benefits in terms of 8 Ps which are being provided by competitors are not being provided by the own university that is the identification of Point of Difference (POD). After analyzing all those, marketer will go for SWOT analysis in

terms of 8 Ps offered by the competitor.

3. After the first and second steps, the third step is to determine the positioning strategy of the university, and the programs:

The previous steps will help to determine the positioning strategy of the university. The positioning strategy should reflect the mission statement of the university which will create a different brand identity of the university. It is also to see whether their positioning strategies and strategies for 8 Ps are supporting the mission statement of the university and the program. Universities are built and developed for noble cause to fulfill its mission and objectives. Different programs, curriculum, syllabus, and its teaching method etc. should support the mission, objectives and its positioning strategy.

It is essential to ensure consistency among positioning, identity, strategy, stated goals, communications. [...] It is also important to carefully monitor the consistency not only of the messages expressed by the communications department, but also those of the professors, students, governing authorities... They must all speak with the same voice (Noir Sur Blanc, as cited in Hanover Research, 2014).

4. The fourth step is to determine the strategies for 8 Ps that is Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, Physical Evidence, and Placement (can be incorporated as marketing mix of a university):

4.1 Product: University's different programs are its product. Offering and designing of different programs should be coordinating the prospective students' characteristic in terms of their quality as students, social class, financial ability, perceptions of higher education and objectives of acquiring higher education etc. Programs' curriculum could be teachers' centric, content base or students' centric, outcome base. On the other hand, university can give emphasis on particular programs of different areas like, business, design, engineering, technology, arts, general studies, etc. which is better suited to its mission, vision, objectives, and positioning strategy.

4.2 Price: The tuition fees and other educational costs like, examination fees, library fees, lab fees, late fees, certificate and transcript fees, etc. are the price. The fees and other educational cost should be fixed keeping in mind the prospective students' financial ability, social class, and their desire to invest in higher education. The facilities of payment in installment, discounts, arrangement of different scholarships for poor and/or meritorious students, facilities of bank loan etc. may encourage the prospective students to get admitted into university.

4.3 Place: "Place includes company activities that make the product available to target consumers" (Kotler, Armstrong, Agnihotri, Haque 2013). *Universities geographic area is its place. Student favors the university campus in the renowned city or nearby their living place or job place, or the place for which they can get easy transport to reach the campus. Providing transport facilities for students may help deciding students to admit favorably in the universities* (Ahmed Sk. Shahabuddin, Vol.9, No.6, 2017).

4.4 Promotion: Marketing team of the university should determine the communication message, tools, and media. The consistency in communication message and maintaining corporate identity in its all communication is required. All communication should reflect the positioning strategy of the university. Choosing communication tools and media, and designing the message should be done according to the prospective students' demographic, behavioral, socio-economic characteristics. There are traditional communication tools such as Advertising, Sales Promotion, Direct Marketing, Publicity, Public Relation, Personal Selling, and Internet Marketing. Internet marketing is not only an effective tool of communication but also it is an effective media for other promotional tools. A good website is a very effective and good promotional tool for a university. It may mention the strength and opportunities of different programs, achievements of graduates, students' works, events etc. Most of the students are using social media specially Facebook. It is easy to reach them through Facebook. To promote, some neglected vehicles play a very much influential role other than the promotional tools that are the PROs of the university, the existing students, alumni, and their guardians.

Strategically overall promotional activities can be divided into two types; that is Creative Strategy and Media Strategy. *Creative Strategy* involves determining the basic appeal and message the advertiser wishes to convey to the target audience (Belch & Belch, 2003). *Media Strategy* involves determining which communication channels will be used to deliver the advertising message to the target audience (Belch & Belch, 2003).

4.5 People: In service providing organization people is considered as another 'P'. Those who provide services to its clients are entitled as people in service providing organization. For a university, the teachers and the advisors, are play a vital role as the service provider. Besides, people of Public Relation, IT supports, Admission, Examination, and Accounts department are also important service provider in a university. The qualities of their

services are very much important factor for the satisfaction of the students. Marketing team of the university should fix the measurable parameter for the quality of their services.

4.6 Process: There are many processes that the students have to face in a university. Process of enrolment, payment process, registration process, learning process, examination process, result publishing process, result correction process, event organization process, retaking process, pass, fail, and getting good grade process, etc. are some of the process. The ease or difficulties of all those processes are very much influential factors of students' satisfaction. A very good university automation software may be able to make all those processes very much easier for not only to the students, alumni, their guardian, but also employees of different academic and non academic departments of the university.

4.7 Physical Evidence: Services are intangible; it cannot be stored or touched. However, tangible elements can be delivered with service to create better customer experience. Well organized and well decorated university campuses, reception desk, class rooms, well equipped laboratories are the examples of the physical evidences. On the other hand, Internet/web page of the university, Paper works (such as invoices, and dispatch notes, etc.), Brochures, Furnishings, Uniforms, Business cards, etc.; the quality and design of those elements helps increasing students satisfaction.

4.8 Placement: The programs which have comparatively less job prospect do not attract students to get admit. Program selection and curriculum design of the university should be done according to the requirements of the job market of the country and the world. There should be active placement cell to assist students and graduates to get intern and job. The ratio of placement of the graduates of a program or a university is counted as a remarkable parameter of quality, and ranking of the university, and it is also the important factor of the satisfaction of the graduates. As a result, many universities are taking the placement of their graduates as a great concern.

5. After analyzing information and determining the strategies in the previous steps university marketer will undertake the course of actions according to the strategies in the step five and implement it:

After analyzing previous steps marketer will determine the course of actions that is to be implemented to overcome its objectives. The action plan will be taken according to the determined positioning strategy and according to the strategies of 8 Ps. Finally, marketer will implement those actions.

6. The sixth step is to monitor the course of actions that have been taken as the marketing programs are implemented in an intended way.

After determination and implementation of marketing actions; in the step six it is to monitor that the course of actions have been taken as the marketing programs are implemented in an intended way. In this stage, marketers not only monitor the marketing activities but also it evaluates and controls the activities. It is to see that how the overall marketing activities are meeting the different marketing goals and objectives.

Conclusion

Marketing for university or for another organization is a vast thing. It is difficult to explain by a 4 pages article. But this article focused all the major areas or the areas which marketers may not look into. Now a day's smart marketer does not look for the customer for their product rather they design their products for the demand of their customer. For university, marketers select and design their programs according to the social requirement. There must be honest approach in marketing. If marketer's commitment and action do not match, then the customers will lose the faith. As a result, marketer has to be sincere for their commitment in communication as well as action. Another important aspect of marketing is rapid response time. Smart marketers are rapidly responses to the opportunities and the threats of the market.

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