

Marketing in GI Education

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SUMMARY

Marketing is an obvious and successful tool in industry. However, it is little developed in the strategies and business processes of GI institutes. In GI education, institute managers face decreasing number of students, increasing quality control, and increasing national and international competition. This evokes the need for extended business-oriented marketing strategies. But most of the GI institute managers are not experts in marketing. We describe how the Institute for Geoinformatics, University of Münster, is dealing with these challenges: Why we think it necessary to improve our marketing, what we did so far, and what we are planning for the development and implementation of marketing concepts. This paper's goal is two-folded: To provide information and ideas to GI institute managers in similar situations, and to initiate discussions and receive feedback for our initiatives.

KEYWORDS: *Marketing, GI Education, marketing concept, internationalization*

INTRODUCTION

Marketing is an established tool of modern companies and institutions. They look at themselves from the customers' perspective and improve their products and services. Higher Institutions for Education started to follow this trend. On first view, higher education and other services might not be concluded similar; however, students are a market segment as many others (Canterbury 1999).

Activities are, for example,

- Managing students' loyalty. Universities try to bind alumni to the university, copying the culture of US universities and targeting new means for fund raising (Henning-Thurau, Langer and Hansen 2001)
- Execute public relations tools, e.g., online presence (Sommer 2004). Universities target to establish their institution as a brand, turning commercial marketing techniques to enhance their images, attract better students, and raise more money (Pulley 2003)
- Recruit international students. Internationalization of education has become a quality criterion for universities, and many of them develop tools and strategies for international students' acquisition, e.g., University of Kassel, Germany, by the AIDA approach ((A)ttention, (I)nterest, (D)esire, and (A)ction) (Langer 2004).

Some universities target comprehensive approaches, e.g., the University of Applied Sciences in Bremen executed a marketing project for enhancing the number of students, maximization of financial resources, and improving quality in education and research (Hochschule_Bremen 2001). The University of Applied Sciences, Münster, Germany, executed the comprehensive marketing project SMILE in order to acquire good students and teachers, and new partners in the public and private sectors (Baaken 2001).

A national joint initiative of German universities is "GATE Germany" on International marketing to promote study, research and training in Germany (DAAD 2005). Within Germany, the DAAD

(German Academic Exchange Service) creates awareness of the need of higher education marketing, and supports to initiate and develop marketing strategies. Internationally, GATE targets to promote German education and research. A similar approach can be observed in UK, promoting education internationally and recruit world-class international students (British_Council 2000). On the European level, educational programs for non-EU cooperation, e.g., TEMPUS, ALFA, and ASIA-Link, can be considered as marketing strategies to promote European education; the ERASMUS Mundus program directly competes with the US Fulbright program for Latin-American, Asian, and African students.

But rarely there are initiatives on the level of institutes. To the author's opinion, this part of an comprehensive higher education marketing is neglected. A well known, "branded" university might contribute to attract students. However, the quality of a specific study program and the reputation of the institute's teachers and research are crucial for a student's decision.

Due to decreasing number of students by the demographic factor, upcoming new programs of studies in Geoinformatics, and internationalization of education in Europe (Bologna process), GI institutes face an increasing national and international competition. In addition, ministries of education and university administrations intensify supervision and controlling of the institutes' quality and costs. GI institute managers face an increasingly heterogeneous and competitive business environment.

Consequently, the development and implementation of marketing strategies are becoming essential requirements of GI institutes' strategies and business processes. But typically, GI institute managers are scientists and professors, not marketing experts. How to face this challenge?

This paper will describe the situation at the ifgi as a case study. Our goals are to

- Provide input to GI institutes in terms of information and ideas for their marketing strategies
- Initiate discussions and feedback from GI institutes as an input for our activities.

The second section will show the need for marketing activities at the ifgi. The third section will describe what we did so far. Section 4 will describe the ifgi's first approach to execute a marketing concept in the specific field of "Internationalization of Education", started in the year 2000. The fifth section will provide a preliminary list of strategic goals to be achieved by future marketing activities. Finally, we will present our conclusions, and suggestions for implementing the marketing strategy.

NEED FOR MARKETING

The situation of German university institutes can be characterized by three key developments:

1. *Decreasing number of students:* As in other countries, the baby boom decades have passed, and there will be a lower number of potential students. In addition, German universities are introducing tuition and fees, which might become another reason for a reduced number of students.
2. *Introduction of Bachelor and Master Programs:* German universities have to switch from traditional Diploma Programs to new Bachelor and Master Programs. Besides the organizational changes, there is a significant change of the programs' contents. Currently, Diploma Programs are considered rather homogeneous, e.g., it is not that a big difference for a student's professional career whether he/she received his/her degree in Geography in Münster or in Berlin. The trend of new Bachelor and Master Programs is in specialization. For example, the ifgi will offer a consecutive Bachelor and Master of Science in Geoinformatics with a strong background in informatics and mathematics. The University of Applied Science of Stuttgart, Germany, offers a Master in Photogrammetry and Geoinformatics (<http://www.fht-stuttgart.de/fbv/fbvmas/index.html>), and the University of Applied Sciences of Karlsruhe, Germany, offers a Master of Science in Geomatics (http://www.fbg.fh-karlsruhe.de/master_geomatics/index.html) with emphasis on New

Media. Consequently, there is an emerging need for GI institutes to position themselves in an increasingly heterogeneous market. All institutes have to position themselves in an increasingly competitive market.

3. *Increasing quality and cost control*: In Germany, we can observe an increasing controlling and evaluation of universities and institutes. One aspect is to reduce costs due to reduced state finances. Another aspect is to improve quality of education as a key success factor to strengthen economy.

For GI institutes, we can observe two additional key factors. First, few potential students are aware of the “exotic” field of Geoinformatics and taking a GI program into consideration. Second, the career perspectives of GI Bachelors and Masters are not that good anymore as they were assumed few years ago (Brox and Pires 2004).

GI institutes have to face these challenges with a more business-oriented perspective and new management methods. A key tool is to improve the quality of products and services by the development and implementation of a marketing strategy.

STATUS QUO: MARKETING AT THE IFGI

The ifgi considers itself as a modern and innovative institute. This includes activities that can be considered as marketing activities, e.g.,:

- Since long, students evaluate their courses in order to provide a feedback to their teachers and improve the quality of teaching.
- Annually, we present our next year’s courses to the students and discuss the content of courses and program of studies.
- We invite external teachers in order to teach topics we cannot provide on own resources.
- We increase the number of courses in English courses because we think English language essential for our students’ professional careers.
- We offer courses in key qualifications, e.g., scientific writing, presentation, and project management, because we think it essential for a high-quality education.
- We create possibilities for our students studying abroad.
- For public relations, we annually invite pupils and citizens of Münster and its surroundings to an “Open Day” providing information about the institute, research, and education. And we annually present our program of study within the “Münster University Day” to potential students.
- We engaged a designer for establishing a corporate design in order to present ourselves more professionally.

The examples do not provide a complete overview, but they demonstrate the message: There are many good ideas and activities. But it is not a comprehensive and complete approach. We observed two major impediments:

First, there is a lack of controlling of activities. A small example is the provision of public relations materials about the institute. It took a long time before each project was able to provide a poster with some general project information. And the online descriptions are not always up-to-date. There is a gap in management structure, because responsibilities for execution and controlling are not arranged in an appropriate way.

Second, there is no mechanism for recognizing if something is missing or going wrong. For example, we perceived ourselves as an internationally acting institute. But that was only true for research – cooperating with international partners in projects, publications, and institutions. But we were not aware that we were not cooperating internationally in education. The number of exchange students was zero, teachers’ mobility almost zero.

A FIRST APPROACH: INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION

The observation of a lack of international cooperation in education initiated a first approach of a marketing concept. In 2000, we started a marketing initiative on a single topic: Internationalization of education.

As a methodological approach, we used a general structure of a marketing concept by CHE (CHE 1999):

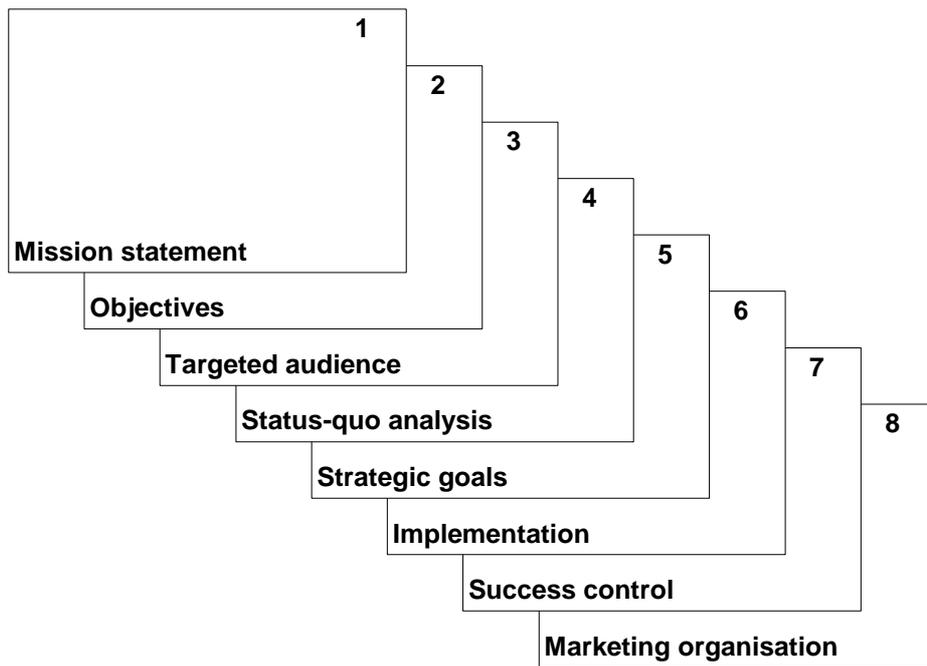


Figure 1: Structure of Marketing Concept (adapted from (CHE 1999))

In the following, we describe the filling of the marketing concept, exemplary and partially (September 2000):

1. Mission: Internationalization of education
2. Objectives: Quality assurance of education by international cooperation, and extended exchange of students and teachers
3. Targeted audience: Graduate and PhD students (ifgi, external), professors (ifgi, external), research assistants (ifgi, external)
4. Status-quo analysis:
External: many international contacts, cooperation with international organizations, high level of name recognition;
Internal: Few international students, few international teachers, partial offer of English courses, few standards and lacking organizational framework for mobility measures
5. Strategic goals (short-, medium-, and long term):
Ten incoming/outgoing students within the next two years, twenty within the next three years;
Four external teachers within the next two years;

- Five English courses in winter semester 2002/03;
 Introduction of Bachelor and Master Programs in winter semester 2003/04;
 Harmonized curriculum with at least three European GI institutes in winter semester 2003/04
6. Implementation: Network project with European partners, switching German courses to English; establishment of working group for Bachelor/Master introduction
 7. Success control:
 Success in extending students and teachers mobility measures, e.g., summer school Münster 2002;
 Increasing number of English courses, e.g., summer school;
 Delay in introduction of Bachelor and Master Programs;
 Impossibility to harmonize curricula with international partners – alternative solution: create organizational framework for cooperation and set up standards for exchange of students and teachers
 8. Marketing organization: Establishing project manager for network activities and educational issues.

This marketing concept was not executed by marketing professionals. Therefore, there are weaknesses in concept and realization. On the other hand, it was very successful: We were not only establishing a European network for GI Science Education (www.eduGI.net), but also extending our networking to Latin-America (www.eduGI.net/eduGLLA/) and four US universities. Students' incomings and outgoing increased to more than thirty-five within four years, starting at zero. Teachers' mobility increased to more the twenty incomings and outgoing within four years. Students and teachers are more aware of the possibilities and advantages of learning and teaching abroad, affecting an increasing demand for mobility measures. Being not successful in one topic, e.g., curriculum harmonization, is leading to alternative ideas and activities, e.g., students working in ongoing research projects of the hosting partner university.

CONTENTS OF A FUTURE MARKETING STRATEGY

Internationalization of education was a first attempt to execute a marketing concept. Our goal is to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for GI education. The following list provides preliminary targets of a marketing strategy, which has to be proofed and detailed during the benchmarking process at the beginning of the marketing concept:

- Currently, the ifgi has a sufficient numbers of applicants for the Diploma GI Program. Switching to Bachelor and Master Programs, decreasing number of students, and a generally small awareness of GI Science will evoke the need for activities assuring a sufficient quantity and quality of students' applications.
- The number of students leaving the university without a degree varies. We have to analyze the significance of numbers and reasons, and if applicable find strategies for enabling students to leave university with a degree.
- We need to maintain and extend existing networks in Europe, Latin-America, and USA.
- Mobility measures have to be maintained on the current level, maybe increased. The resources for receiving students have to be organized more efficiently.
- We have to increase the productivity of students in writing papers as an essential part of a high-quality education.
- The quality of course contents requires an ongoing evaluation.
- New Bachelor and Master Programs have to be positioned in the national and international market.
- Workflows in education might be optimized, e.g., by sharing resources internally and externally, e.g., by exchange of e-Learning courses.
- Public relation of the ifgi has to be optimized for a German audience as well as for an international audience.

This preliminary list is not complete and sufficient. One of our ideas is that the development of a marketing strategy helps us to fill the gaps we are not aware of.

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

GI institute managers face new challenges as the increasing national and international competition, an increasing need for quality control and cost reduction, and foreseeable difficulties in students' acquisition.

Ifgi's first approach in developing and executing a marketing concept in a specific area was not supported by professional marketing experts. However, it had some success.

Our future plans are to initiate a comprehensive marketing strategy for education and research. Our next steps will be:

- Update and acquire additional marketing knowledge, e.g., by the marketing workshop at AGILE 2005
- Acquire marketing experts for support, e.g., at University of Münster (Marketing Center Münster), DAAD (marketing department), or CHE (Center for University Development)
- Set up a marketing strategy in 2005
- Create awareness and support for the marketing strategy in the ifgi environment (university, faculty, institute directorate, staff members, students, administration)
- Execute marketing activities until 2006.

A discussion of marketing concepts with colleagues is very welcome!

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