

Sector cuts: The impact on marketing

As the cuts take hold across the sector, how will institutional marketing fare? A top line survey of marketing contacts across the sector indicates the key trends plus a major risk factor.

WHERE THE CUTS ARE BITING:

[1] EVALUATION

More than ever, institutions must prove that money and resources spent provide tangible and beneficial returns. The introduction of new KPIs and continuous evaluation for marketing related activity is reshaping how marketing is planned, delivered and funded. This is driving a significant change in the development of marketing strategy, a process which many institutions have now been forced to revisit to ensure that marketing planning is fit for purpose in a reconfigured sector environment.

[2] STAFFING

Many institutions have placed their marketing staffing under review, to determine whether marketing across the organisation is serviced as effectively as possible. They need to know if marketing works efficiently across the institution or if standards and service provision (and consequently, return on investment and value for money) are variable. This has led to some major restructures, with a push towards greater cohesion between central marketing services and marketing (activity, resource and staff) situated within faculties, schools and departments, for example.

[3] EXPERTISE

Against a backdrop of massive sector change, it is inevitable that the specialist skills required to make marketing happen effectively for institutions are also changing. There has been a marked re-focus on digital and social media expertise to enable institutions to keep pace with stakeholders' demands and expectations.

[4] OUTSOURCING

It has become obvious for some organisations that outsourcing specific marketing related services will save money and could provide added value benefits to the organisation and stakeholder. Prime areas for such developments have been call and enquiry management, linked to efficient customer relationship management (CRM) systems. This has enabled some institutions to respond more effectively to stakeholder enquiries and to field enquiry tracking systems that allow them to monitor and improve conversion ratios: for example, the ratio of enquiries to student enrolments or research contracts and education-to-business transactions.

[5] MARKETING COLLATERAL

Some of the biggest savings for institutions have been made in shifts in dependence upon hard copy marketing collateral to a mix including online material plus digital fulfilment. There is a move away from printing vast numbers of prospectuses towards the management and fulfilment of requests for core marketing materials through the web via digital downloads. While it is likely that there will long be a demand for printed materials in specific circumstances, there has now been a major change in priority between the production of online (digital) and offline (hard copy) marketing materials by institutions.

RISK FACTORS:

COMPETITIVE DIFFERENTIATION

- [1] The reverberations of tuition fee changes will be felt throughout the sector, not just in English institutions.
- [2] At a time when the relative cost of programmes at specific institutions (plus the return on investment to students and other stakeholders in exchange for that cost) will be the subject of constant comparison, the ability to communicate a differentiated and competitive proposition effectively will be critical to future success.
- [3] An effective marketing function and strategy will be essential to the management of this process.
- [4] While marketing is under scrutiny, together with other professional services, its critical role in institutional success should never be underestimated.

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Her consulting portfolio includes international marketing strategies; competitive brand development; location brand strategy; nation branding; business, foresight and policy response planning and competitor analysis. Her coaching and intervention portfolio ranges from strategic decision making to effective leadership, communications and management skills for institutional leaders.

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