Promotion Orientation Verus Market Orientation

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Introduction
All schools market but few are market oriented. By focusing on the promotional and selling side of marketing rather than on building customer value, schools face the danger concentrating on the *trappings of marketing* rather than the substance of marketing.

The proliferation of brochures, pamphlets, billboards, displays, public relations activities, promotional gimmicks, advertising, and scholarship offerings bares testament to the rapid growth in educational marketing. We have witnessed a growth in the sophistication and practice of public relations and promotion activities. Many schools employ marketing consultants, advertising agencies, market research companies, and public relations personnel to drive enrolments and enhance brand image. Marketing positions have been created in schools such as for ‘promotions officer’, ‘communications manager’, ‘director of development’. This push for marketing is quite understandable given the changing educational environment where schools are competing for students and scare resources, but unfortunately by focussing on promotional activities, schools have adopted a promotional or selling orientation rather than a marketing orientation.

Promotional Orientation
The emphasis on promotion is concentrating in only one facet of marketing; that is advertising, personal selling and public relations aspects. This is evidenced by the fact that schools rarely use the word marketing. Rather they use terms such as promotions, communications or development. This *promotional orientation* focuses on what the school offers and how it can best be sold to potential clients. This approach assumes that the school will be effective by selling features and benefits of the school’s programs and services. It sees its role as stimulating the interest of potential students and parents in existing programs and services. This contrasts with a *market oriented* approach which focuses attention on trends, needs, and characteristics of the market rather than on internal production. Market orientation seeks to determine the needs of the market and how best can be satisfied within the resources of the school.

Why is Market Orientation Important?
Research in a range of organisations across all sectors, including service and non-profit organisations, clearly demonstrates that while engaging in marketing activities may be important, ‘market orientation’ is a vital ingredient in determining an organisation’s success. Market orientation improves performance. It can never be a negative.
**What is a market orientation?**
Marketing orientation is the application of the marketing concept. The marketing concept is the basic foundation of modern marketing and, as philosophy of doing business, puts the customer at the center of the organisation. The aim of an organisation is to satisfy and anticipate customer needs. In terms of the school, the marketing concept starts with the student and parent needs as the central focus of school purpose. The school must identify these needs and then decide which ones it should try to satisfy. This is the responsibility of all members of the school community. The opportunity to meet school objectives will occur through the school's efforts to determine student and parent satisfaction.

**Key Features Market Orientation**
There are several key characteristics of a ‘market oriented’ organisation.

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**Customer focus**
The essential feature of this characteristic is to demonstrate an understanding and commitment to customer needs that results in enhanced value. Customer focus is more than simply ‘getting close to the customer.’ An organisation can be market oriented **only if it completely understands its market**. Customer information must go beyond research and promotional functions to permeate every organisational function. The key behaviours of a customer-centred approach include: developing relationships with customers, researching and concentrating on needs, committing to students, providing services of value, focusing on student (customer) satisfaction; measuring and reporting satisfaction, and augmenting existing services.
Competitor orientation

In market orientation, competition is defined broadly to include generic competition as well as specific or direct competition. Generic competition can include hospitals, charities, transport, roads, social services, policing and the like. Competition, from the viewpoint of the customer, is whatever will directly or indirectly satisfy a need. For example, in terms of student study time, competition could include sport, television, computer games and other sources of entertainment. To understand the market, the school must recognise that there is competition and that it is advantageous to ‘benchmark’ the school against other quality programs and facilities that are offered by other schools as well evaluate the offerings from other generic competition. Key behaviours are: open discussion of competitors, evaluating competitor behaviour, assessing competitor strategies, and examining opportunities for improvement.

Inter-functional Coordination

The key indicator of this characteristic is the total commitment of all members to a marketing philosophy and the integration of marketing activities to provide value to the customer. Typical behaviours would include: departments and teams working together to meet student needs, departments and teams sharing market information, teams and departments integrating strategies, all sections working together to offer value to students, and teams willing to share resources.

Long-term Focus

Many schools regard a three year cycle as long term, claiming that the environment is too uncertain to plan beyond this time frame. Despite this, research indicates that organisations should develop strategic plans, or strategic intentions, that go well beyond a three-year cycle. Behaviours associated with this aspect include: adopting a long term focus in matters of growth/survival, attempting to service all customers (students, parents, agencies, suppliers etc) in the long run, aiming for effective organisational performance in the marketplace, identifying and implementing new value added services, and identifying and overcoming deficiencies in school services.

Market Intelligence System

Most schools carry out parent surveys and obtain feedback from informal observation and discussion, but they seldom have a systemic and integrated approach to data gathering, analysis, storage and retrieval of market information. Market oriented organisation have intimate knowledge of their customer needs from a number of perspectives which are continuously communicated and discussed by organisational members. Key behaviours include: systemic methods of organising and retrieving of current information, an intelligence network who collect and share information with everyone in the organisation, a systematic research approach to gather new market information through qualitative and quantitative methods, and a process for analyzing information for decision making purposes.

Barriers to market orientation.

There are significant obstacles to the successful implementation of a market
orientation. These are to do with people and organisational structures that prevent marketing orientation.

The people problem
The attitude and actions of staff is the major influencer in determining levels of market orientation. Indifferent and negative attitudes to marketing at all levels in the school remain significant barriers. This is often coupled with both a lack of commitment and skills of top management.

Basically there is a lack of understanding of marketing. Ninety percent of teachers believe that marketing is either selling or advertising. The negative attitude towards marketing by teachers and a large number of the community stems from the belief that marketing as manipulative, offence and misleading. For a school to engage in such practices is regarded as somewhat demeaning. Words such as marketing, customer, client, selling, competition more often raise the hackles of teachers, parents and administrators.

Teachers are also particularly weary of the notion of ‘competition’. School communities believe that competition amongst schools is unhealthy and counterproductive. Competition between independent schools and between state and independent schools is more accepted, but the notion of competition between state schools is an anathema. There is also a view that governments should provide adequate funding and resources for schools and that they should not be forced to market or gain sponsorship. Finally teachers do not see that marketing should be part of their role and resist or comply reluctantly.

System barriers.
Other barriers relate to the organisation: its structure, systems and processes. Many organisations regard market orientation as too expensive to implement. They regard themselves as too small and don’t have the necessary systems, expertise or infrastructure or resources to engage in marketing activities or market training. Centralised and bureaucratic systems are less accommodating to dissemination of information and organisational responsiveness to market intelligence. Departmentalisation, unclear marketing aims and objectives, lack of marketing skills, reward systems based on cost cutting and short-term survival, an unclear view of the customer; and perceived lack of competitive differentiation inhibit market orientation.
**Summary**

There is clear evidence that organisations that are market orientated will outperform those organisations that are not. It is not clear that those originations that focus only on promotion and selling will gain any lasting benefit. The trappings of marketing have a spurious attractiveness about them. We can see the advertisements, brochures, billboards, displays and open days. They are the tangible manifestations of marketing but are no substitute for developing a market orientation. To create a real difference a school must replace the quick fix, the superficial trappings of marketing, with more substantial efforts to create cultural and organisational change that respects customers and their needs. But to affect the change, administrators will need to develop strategies to overcome the barriers to market orientation.

Public relations, advertising and a selling orientation may draw attention to the school and but it is doubtful how much this will attract and maintain customers in the long term. In contrast a market oriented school can add value and help achieve more satisfied customers that are likely to become supporters and advocates for the school because of the relationships that are established. Market oriented schools have an intimate knowledge and understanding of their customers, the ability to anticipate needs, an awareness and knowledge of competitors, a collaborative system where the all members works together, and an intelligence system that provides the necessary information for informed decision making.

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