

Best Practices in Marketing Executive Education



Research Committee Summary

Pat Cataldo
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SUMMARY

The marketing of executive education is evolving to meet ever-changing needs. Just as corporations have had to modify their marketing mix and message to meet demographic, economic, and technological developments, so too have university open enrollment and custom program businesses had to modify their marketing approach. Keeping pace with the continual need for client identification, contact, and communication has been met with a sense of marketing urgency and openness to new ideas, new platforms, and new tools. Gone are the days when a brochure and an application in the mail would generate sufficient interest and enrollments to sustain the business.

In today's volatile global economy, the need for leadership at organizations around the world has never been greater. Executives are challenged by more management data, more real-time communication, more distributed organizations, and more global opportunity. As a result, there is a need for better information synthesis, analysis, and leadership decision-making both domestically and internationally. There is increasing recognition that, today, lifelong learning is no longer a competitive elective but, rather, a business necessity.

Colleges and universities are providing new open enrollment and customized programs for senior leaders to address these needs. However, it is the job of the marketing group to develop promotional strategies and implementation plans to ensure the broadest message reach to—and responsiveness by—new and existing clients. As a result, the marketing approach has become even more dynamic and reactive in an effort to meet the needs of a broadened client base in an unprecedented economy. Recognizing these changes and the effects they are having on both schools and clients, UNICON commissioned a research study¹ on marketing executive education.

SCOPE AND RESEARCH METHODS

Since executive education marketing is a very broad subject, the research targeted three specific areas:

- Open enrollment marketing
- Custom program marketing
- Brand awareness marketing

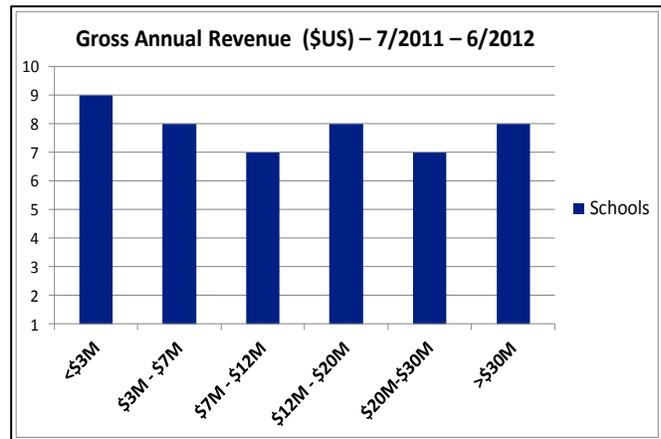
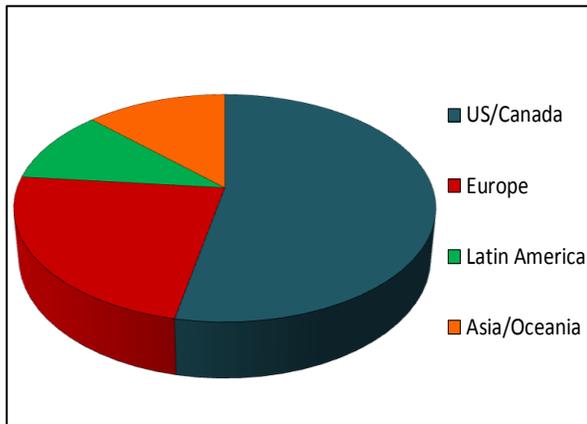
A variety of research methods were used for this study. A primary survey was sent to UNICON member schools regarding their current practices for open enrollment, custom programs, and brand awareness. A secondary survey was sent to respondents once their completed primary survey was received. A literature search was conducted on marketing executive education. Telephone and face-to-face interviews provided additional insight and information. Public relations releases were tracked for executive education from June 1,

¹ *This report was sponsored by the UNICON Research Committee and conducted by Pat Cataldo, formerly managing director at UNC. Pat is a past chair and emeritus board member of UNICON. The author can be reached at patcataldojr@gmail.com or 919 259-8470.*

2012 to November 1, 2012. The web site of each school was visited and reviewed. Finally, selected companies were contacted and asked to provide feedback on the most effective marketing strategies from executive education providers.

UNICON MEMBER SURVEY

An invitation to participate in the marketing executive education survey was sent to all UNICON primary representatives. A total of 47 responses were received. The completed surveys provided information that represented a wide range of school locations, program sizes, and revenue distribution. Respondents were geographically dispersed and almost equally divided by size of operation from up to \$3M to over \$30M. Seventy percent of respondents listed custom as their primary business segment. Twenty-four percent of respondents listed open enrollment as their primary business segment. Six percent of respondents listed consortia or other as their primary business segment. In the executive education organization, 55% of respondents have a combined marketing and sales unit while 45% have separate marketing and sales units.



SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Key findings emerging from the study:

- Marketing strategies are evolving from traditional methods to more social media
- Web sites are the most effective marketing channel for open, custom, and brand awareness
- A majority of the schools spend 5% or less of revenue on their marketing efforts
- Marketing spend is not consistently allocated to the most effective channels

MARKETING STRATEGY

The marketing strategy used by 85% of the respondents for open is a combination of a push (personal selling activity) and a pull (advertising, sales promotion and publicity) to attract potential clients. For the custom business, 57% of respondents use a push strategy of personal selling to prospects and clients. 89% of the schools changed their marketing

strategy last year to include more digital marketing and less print/direct mail, more social media, and a more targeted focus in either a regional or global direction.

MARKETING CHANNELS

The most effective marketing channel for open, custom, and brand awareness was web sites. Fifty-five percent of the schools make major web site changes less than once per year. Twenty percent of the schools make major web site changes once per year. Twenty six percent of the schools make web site changes more than once per year. Eighteen schools reported either completing a major web redesign or being in the process of a major web redesign in the past year.

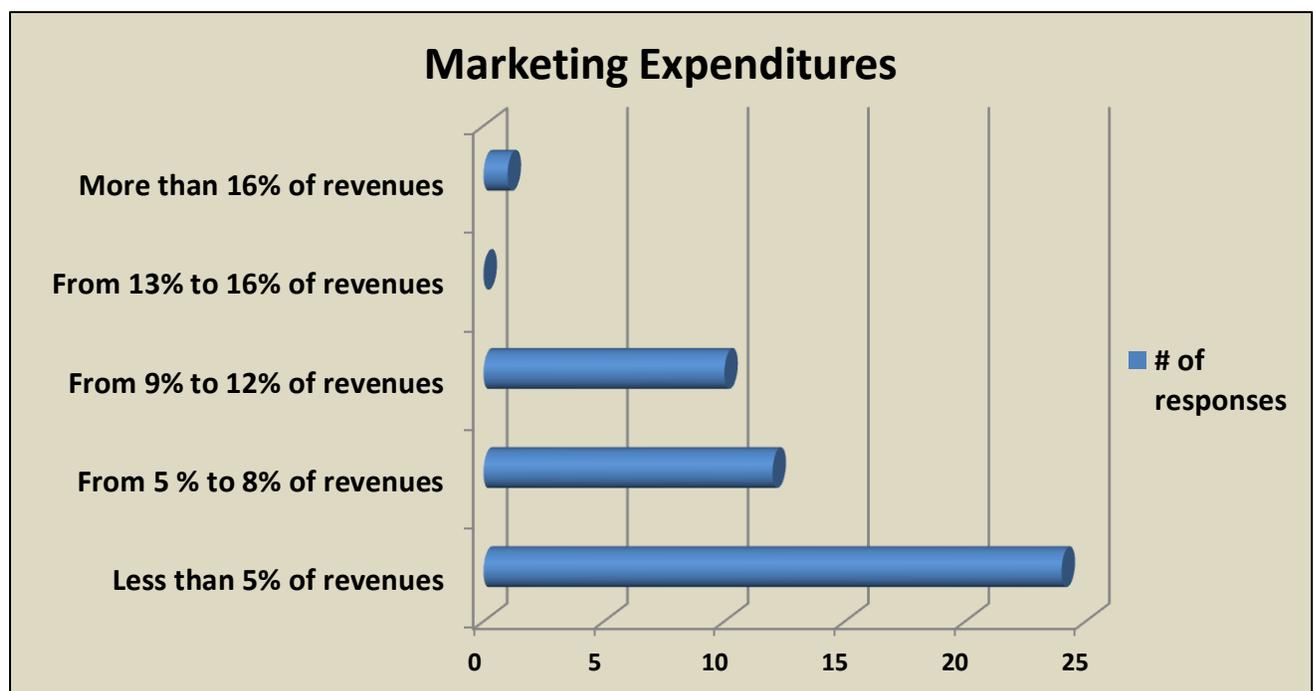
MARKETING – GENERAL

The four areas most commonly cited in best practices were: building client relationships, regularly publishing faculty research, conducting client and prospect focused marketing events with top speakers, and investing in direct selling resources.

MARKETING SPEND

Ten schools spend 100% and 24 schools spend 90% or more of their marketing dollars to promote programs domestically (in country). Sixteen schools spend 15% of their marketing dollars to promote programs internationally (outside country).

Marketing spend, as a percentage of annual executive education revenue, shows nearly half of the schools spending from \$100K to well over \$4.8M dollars per year.



Respondents cited web sites as their most effective marketing channels, but the largest percentage of marketing expenditures is still allocated to traditional methods.

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

When respondents returned their completed surveys, they were immediately sent a second survey. Seventy-nine percent of the schools responded to five additional questions. These were designed to gather more information on biggest challenges, RFP and RFQ evaluation criteria, client perceptions, and ROI measurement, as well as any additional information schools wished to provide.

LIST OF SCHOOLS

The following UNICON member schools participated in the marketing research study.

Ashridge	ISB	Tsingua
Babson	ITAM	U Alberta
CEIBS	Manchester Bus. School	U Georgia
Columbia	Michigan State	U Hawaii
Cranfield	MIT	U Michigan - Ross
Dartmouth - Tuck	National University of Singapore	U Santa Clara
ESADE	Northeastern	U Southern California – Marshall
FDC	Ohio State - Fisher	U Toronto – Rotman
Harvard	Penn State	U Virginia – Darden
HKUST	Pontifical Universidad Catolica de Chile	U Washington – Foster
IE	Simmons	U of Western Ontario – Ivey
IESE	Skolkovo	U of North Carolina
IMD	Smith	U of St. Gallen
Insead	SMU - Cox	Universidad de San Andres
Inspira	Thunderbird	Wharton – U of Pennsylvania



CONCLUSION

Recommendations are made at the conclusion of this report to enable marketing groups to assess their activities against the data presented for open, custom, and brand awareness.