

A MORE EFFECTIVE WAY TO ADVERTISE THE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES: Mobile Marketing Approach

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays organizations strive to find the ways to communicate with their target audiences by using varied advertising mediums because of the developments on the information communication technologies and the globalization. In this context, like the other institutions, the distance education institutions has to execute communication activities by using different advertising mediums to create a positive position in their consumers minds. In this sense, the increase on the ownership of mobile phones and the new specialties of mobile phone technologies like accessing to the internet made mobile marketing efforts important on the advertising investments of distance education institutions. Especially with the mobile marketing, distance education institutions can create personalized informative and promotion messages for their target audiences. Mobile marketing approach has lots of advantages for the institutions and the most important advantages that helps the institutions are; the formats of the approach are forming according to the newest technological developments and it gives chance to create messages for specific target audiences. But mobile marketing has also disadvantages like; the target audience's mobile phones can be incompatible with the messages and the target audience can ignore these messages. However much the approach has some disadvantages, the distance education institutions- which are based on the technological developments also like the mobile marketing approach- has to invest on mobile marketing according to send personalized and effective advertising messages about their programs' contents, benefits etc.

Keywords: Mobile advertising, mobile marketing; information technology; distance education.

INTRODUCTION

Today, because of the current developments in globalization and information communication technologies created global markets and global competition environment, the institutions strive to survive and to reach the consumers who are becoming desensitized to advertising messages that come from lots of mediums. The distance education programmes which aim to provide instruction in places and times which are convenient for learners (Moore and Kearsley, 1996:3) are effected both positively and negatively from the developments of information communication technologies like all other companies. The most important contribution of the information communication technologies to the distance education programs is that; the programs has a system that operates with information communication technologies together and with the developments on the information communication technologies the distance education programmes' structures are changing and developing.

But like every institution, the distance education institutions are effected by the global competitive environment and noticed the importance of promoting its contents and benefits to the target audiences. In such an environment, marketing and advertising efforts are becoming more important day by day for all institutions. The advertising and marketing efforts must be prosecuted successfully for the institutions' survival in this competitive environment. So like every area, the advertising and marketing efforts must be changed and be compatible with the new environment and the new technologies. This changing environment increased the expectations from advertising and marketing activities and some new concepts are started occurring (Kocabas, 2005:39).

According to F. Buttle, Don Peppers, Martha Rogers and M. J. Bitner the conventional marketing era is becoming invalid and inadequate so there is a transition to modern marketing and advertising era. According to Buttle et al.; there are some reason of this transition which are; increasing global competition, the consumers who demand more than before, the increasing division of consumption markets, the changes on the consumer behaviors, the rising standards on quality, the inadequacy of quality alone for the competitive advantage, the information communication technology's effects on product and services etc (Ersoy and Karalar, 2010).

This approach has more personal effect than mass effect. In other words, modern marketing and advertising approach is based on the person, not on the masses. With the modern advertising and marketing approach, the institutions will be more effective in the global world with personalized communication (Wells et al, 2006: 271). The distance education institutes should apply this new approach to it's communication efforts and consider the importance of this approach like the other institutes and organizations have. There are lots of student candidates of distance education programs from different ages and social classes so in order to reach these target audiences distance education programmes' advertising messages should be personalized and different for their specific audiences.

The concept of modern marketing has become valid after 1960's and within these years 'classical marketing' era has started closing, modern marketing era which embraced the 'consumer focused' understanding was born. With the modern marketing era, some concept like consumer satisfaction, consumer loyalty etc. were born that focused on consumers' need and wants. The marketing activities of this era are based on consumers (Pira and Baytekin, 2004: 758). The execution of modern marketing is more easy and suitable for the distance education programmes' institutes because distance education's structure is more consumer and personal based. The target audience of a distance education program ranges from lawyers to engineers, journalists to economists and young college students to children according to the program's content and aim, so all the marketing messages must be personal to make the target audience effected by the advertising/ marketing message. The expectations of an engineer group's can be different than young college student group's so the target audiences must be specified by the distance education institutions and the programmes' advertising messages must be created according to these specific audiences' needs, wants, expectations etc.

MOBILE MARKETING OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Mobil marketing is a marketing concept that provides an opportunity to the institutes of reaching the consumers who always carry their mobile phones with them. In this context, with using mobile phones as a new medium, distance education program institutes can reach all it's target audiences ranges from lawyers to engineers,

journalists to economists and young college students to children who use mobile phones.

According to Geoffrey Handley; effective marketing's key is; understanding the audience. Nowadays customers want more integrated marketing so be more emphasis toward more integrated marketing communications. So mobile is an ideal platform for integrating messages, developing relationship and direct marketing. Mobile's two unique characteristics of interaction and target audience had made it as most effective medium of advertising. It gives power to marketers and advertisers to access the customers virtually any time and anywhere. Consumers also enjoy choosing and responding to the ads of their interest. Because of this reason marketers and advertisers are now viewing mobile devices as an ideal platform for marketing communications. (Ashraf and Kamal, 2010:10)

New mobile phones which have better technological basis are put on the market every day that goes by. The brands like; Apple, Motorola, Nokia, Panasonic, Samsung, Siemens, Sony Ericsson, Fujitsu, LG, Raks competes with each other to create mobile phones that offers technological opportunities and specialties. It can be said that if there were that much variety and brand of mobile phones then there must have been lots of individuals that use mobile phones.

The researches have shown that the ownership of mobile phones is increasing worldwide. According to Wireless Intelligence; there are 5 billion mobile phone users worldwide. The four billion connections mark was surpassed at the end of 2008, and some analysts at Wireless Intelligence predict six billion connections worldwide by the middle of 2012. Analyst Ben Wood from CCS Insight said that; "Five billion phones means there are more than three times as many phones as personal computers. This device has become part of the fabric of society, whether a teenage girl takes a Blackberry to bed with her, or a farmer in an African village trying to find out the latest crop prices". (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10569081>; 2010)

In order to inform the distance education program to the target audience who wants to be educated and make them aware of the program's specialties and advantages, the institute must decide a suitable medium for the advertising messages. In this context the mobile phones- that have an increasing usage rate- can be assumed as an important medium for the distance education programmes' advertising messages. Because the advertising and marketing professionals wanted to benefit from these highly used communication tools, the concept of mobile marketing was born.

Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) defines the concept of mobile marketing as; it is a set of practices which enables organizations to communicate and engage with their target audiences in an interactive and relevant manner through any mobile device or network. The mobile marketing actualizes with WAP technology executes in two ways which are; push-based and pull-based. Push-based versions are mostly the SMS messages that sent by the institutions.

These must be sent to the consumers according to their permissions. Pull-based ones are which the consumers want information from the advertiser or the institution by this way (Karjaluo et al, 2004:111). The president of Datacomm Research Ira Brodsky suggests his thoughts about this concept as; "Mobile phone service will become an extraordinarily powerful marketing channel.

It reaches more than two billion people everywhere they go by voice, text, and increasingly multimedia. Successful merchants will leverage mobile phone technology to create deeper and longer-lasting customer relationships."

(<http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/10-23-2006/0004456995&EDATE=2003>).

Since mobile is a very personal device for consumers few researchers suggest to take permission from the consumers and to give them incentive to participate in the advertisement. Tsang, *et al.* suggested that mobile advertising should require consumers' permission, and that entertainment and incentive are important variables to improving mobile advertising attitudes. Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) suggests that; increasing numbers of consumers are willingly accept mobile advertising, provided they are given relevant content and sufficient incentives to do so (Ashraf and Kamal, 2010:11).

THE TYPES OF MOBILE MARKETING THAT CAN BE USED FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES' ADVERTISING MESSAGES

Today institutions allocate more money than the past from their advertising budgets to mobile marketing. The research results that have been done by the Turkish Statistical Institute at 2010 had shown that; 90% of the Turkish people own a mobile phone

(http://www.haberiniz.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17743&Itemid=178, 2010). In this context the if the distance education programme is targeted for the Turkish people then mobile phones can be an effective advertising medium for the programmes' promotion messages. The developments on mobile marketing and advertising and the strengthening on the technological infrastructure diversified the mobile advertising types. The mobile advertising types can be separated into two different groups which are; on-device mobile display advertising and off-device mobile display advertising. The main specialties of these groups can be determined as; the ones that can access to internet and the ones that can not access to internet.

On-Device Mobile Display Advertising

The individuals can access the internet via mobile phones because the internet has become a part of daily lives. This advertising type-which defined as the mobile internet advertising also- make the consumers get exposed to the advertising messages, advertising videos when they access to a web site from their mobile phones. The target audiences of distance education programmes are mostly the individuals who tend to use internet more then the other advertising mediums so distance education programmes should use internet as an advertising medium (Sabuncuoglu, Gökaliiler, 2009:11). Internet comes to the forefront as a very important medium in advertising the distance education programmes in the present day. Jeff Harmon, Marketing Director of *University of Illinois Online*, who advocates that the medium which must be selected in the process of advertising the distance education program must usually be the internet, says that the distance education students have internet access and obtain any information on line and hence their whole market is in on-line position and in this context they must invest almost all of their advertising and marketing budget in the online efforts (Lorenzetti, 2005:5). On-device display ads take several forms which have immediate analogs on the PC-based Internet, and include formats such as (IAB, 2011:6):

- Text ads (static and also clickable)
- Graphical banners (static and also clickable)
- Graphical banners with associated text links
- Video preroll
- Traditional TV Commercials at standard lengths

Text ads are; the text based advertisements that can be seen when accessing a web site. The distance education programmes' ad messages can take the attention of the target audiences when they access a web site and if the ad message is in the interest area of the target audience then the target audience can attend to the ad message about the education programme.

Sometimes these ads can help the distance education programmes' awareness level of the consumers. With this kind of advertisement, general information or specific information about the distance education programmes can be given.

Graphical banners have two different types. The first type is which an individual can click on and can not click on. If an individual clicks on the ad message of the education programme then this clicking will direct the individual to that distance education programme's web site. This kind of ads are so attractive because they are graphical based. These attractive ads try to make the consumer click on it so then the web site would direct the individual to that distance education programme's web site. In this context the web sites of the distance education programmes must be attractive too as the ad is. Especially the target audience has to find the information that he/she wanted to find from the web site of the distance education programme.

Video preroll is an ad type which is based on the video based content. Within this type distance education programmes can show 15-30 second videos to their target audiences about their programme's contents. The researches have shown that advertising professionals spent 54% of their budget on interactive pre-rolls units rather than other video advertising options like branded entertainment or webisodes at 2010 (<http://www.clickz.com/clickz/column/1709422/pre-roll-video-ads-get-facelift> 2010).

Traditional TV Commercials at standard lengths, is a type which conveys the standard television advertisements of the brands or institutions via mobile phones to target audiences. Because nowadays the advertising investments of the internet ads are increasing the television advertisements are turning into internet based advertisements. The distance education institutions can choose to use their conventional television ads in the internet to reach modern consumers.

The distance education institutes who choose to invest on on-device display advertising should consider the advertising texts to be attractive and the visuals which are graphical based to be effective. The advertising messages must give information about the programme's content, benefits and specialities. Besides the distance education institutes that chooses to invest on mobile advertising should also consider the importance of technical matters like format, media format, file size etc. An advertising campaign's effectiveness depends on how effective and true the advertising messages are conveyed to the target audiences. In this context, especially while using on-device mobile display advertising type the technical matters are important like; conveying the message without deductions. The most important part would be the consumers' lack of knowledge about clicking on the advertisement. The consumer may not know that if he/she clicks on the advertisement then it would direct them to the web site of distance education programme. So the directions about this must be done properly and some ease must be provided to the consumers by creating text taglines. A mobile web banner ad with a text tagline can generate higher click rates (MMA, 2011:6).

Off-Device Mobile Display Advertising

Off-device mobile display advertising is an advertising type that uses the conventional specialties of mobile phones and sends ad messages to the target audiences. Within this type the consumers don't have to access to the internet to get

ad messages. So the ad messages can be conveyed to everyone that has mobile phones. If the distance education institute has the list of current students and/or potential students' mobile phone numbers of their programmes then the ad messages could be sent to all of them when there is a new education programme or there is a sale on the programme etc.

The advertising type which has an interactive speciality can be categorized as: (MMG, 2011:7)

- Text ads (SMS, MMS)
- Branding/CRM (SMS, MMS)
- Banner ads, splash pages (MMS)
- Animated images (MMS)

The text ads that have two different types are the oldest ones of mobile advertising. These types are: (MMG, 2011:7)

- Initial SMS Ad (Appended) is an universal text ad unit of variable often between 20-60 characters length appended to the body portion of the message containing the primary, nonadvertising content of the message.
- Complete SMS Ad (Full Message) is a global text ad unit with up to 160 characters available for advertising usage. There is no primary, non-advertising content on the message and this ad unit is typically delivered as a reply to an Initial SMS Ad or "Text (keyword) to (short code)" call-to-action.

Ad messages come to the mobile phones with a minimum 20 characters to 160 characters. The distance education institutes must convey information about them with a short and clear tone. There are only texts in the SMS messages but there are images and visuals in the MMS messages. In this context, if there are some visuals about the education programme, then the institution can choose to send MMS messages to their target audiences.

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) that defines as; "the infrastructure that enables the delineation of and increase in customer value, and the correct means by which to motivate valuable customers to remain loyal -indeed, to buy again" (Dyche, 2006:4) is important on strengthening consumer- brand relationships and on the process of brand loyalty creating. During this process the institutions convey messages to the target audiences for CRM. The distance education institutions who strive to create strong consumer relationships can use this type of marketing too.

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES' MOBILE MARKETING EFFORTS

The mobile marketing and advertising efforts have some advantages and disadvantages like the other marketing efforts. The first advantage of mobile marketing is; it provides a mutual communication with consumers and there is an active feedback process. Second advantage is that it is possible to segment the target audience by their specialities, to reach the specific target audiences directly and fast, to meet them at the right time and place and to make sure that the target audiences are exposed to the ad message. The third advantage is that it provides benefits on creating marketing plans.

The other advantage is that; it provides information to the target audiences according to the time of the day, to their interests etc. The fifth advantage of mobile marketing is that it makes possible to know where the consumer is and with that information to

cerate and send the messages according to where they go. The last advantage is that; it makes possible to obtain a large data base of the target audiences and to know them better with their data.

There are some disadvantages of this marketing approach's right along with its advantages.

The first disadvantage can be told as; the consumers can be bothered with the messages that come to their mobile phones. The second one is that; the ad messages are sometimes not compatible with the mobile phones' technological specialties. The third one is that; if the mobile marketing has been operated without permission from the consumers, then the consumers can have negative attitudes toward the institutions (Karaca and Ateslioglu, 2006:37-43). There are some advantages that a distance education institution can gain when sending their advertising messages via mobile advertising and marketing efforts. The first advantage can be is that; the student candidates or the students of the programme can contribute to the distance education programme's content, strategies etc. by giving feedbacks, because there would be a mutual communication between the student candidates or the students of the programme and the distance education institution. The other advantage that a distance education programme can have is that; the distance education institution can segment the student candidates or their existent students according to their ages, occupations etc. and the institution to reach the student candidates or their existent students directly and fast.

Also they would have a chance to meet them at the right time and place and to make sure that the student candidates or their existent students are exposed to the education programmes' ad message.

The other advantage of mobile marketing and advertising that the institution can have is that; if the institution invests on mobile efforts then the data that the institution had gained after the efforts can lead the institution's next campaign strategies.

The fourth advantage that the education institution can have is; personal information about the programmes could be sent to the student candidates or their existent students. As an example; if a house wife wants to be educated about a foreign language then the institution can send her mobile phone an ad message about it's programmes' contents, price, days etc.

The biggest advantage is that; the data base that could be gained. With that data base, the institution can advertise it's programme to the old/new and potential students and the institution can create awareness about the education programme and increase the number of the students. Also because the institution has the information about its target audience, it could send the newest programme's ad message to the ones are interested in. The distance education institutes can have some disadvantages while investing on mobile marketing approach's right along with its advantages.

The first disadvantage that can effect negatively the distance education programmes is that; a potential student can be bothered with the education programme's ad message that come to his/her mobile phone. Another disadvantage is that; the ad messages are sometimes not compatible with the mobile phones' technological specialties of a student candidate or an existent student.

The third disadvantage that can effect the distance education institutions negatively is that a student candidate or an existent student can create have negative attitudes

toward the distance education institution if the ad message had sent to his/her mobile phone without their permission.

THE ASPECTS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES' TARGET AUDIENCES ON THE APPROACH OF MOBILE MARKETING

The distance education institutions can invest on mobile marketing -which has born from modern marketing approach- when they need to show their consumers that they put their needs and wants first and when they need to create personal messages for them about their programmes. In this context the consumers' thoughts and points of views about this marketing approach must be known before investing on it. The Mobile Marketing Association made a list of what the consumers are preferring and thinking about the mobile marketing approach. The followings are some customer experiences that can be applied to mobile marketing and ones that marketers should consider when developing their programs: (<http://mmaglobal.com/modules/wfsection/article.php?articleid=796> 2011):

According to the list the customer is in control. Since all activity is voluntary, customer's objectives, goals and emotions must be taken into account from the start of the process to the end. So the permission should be obtained. The second thing in the list is that; the interaction must be true and simple. Most of the messages are opening in long time so more then one step can decrease the attention level of the consumers. The other important thing from the list is that; the experiences of the consumers must be tracked.

The qualitative and quantitative researches must be improved. According to the Nielsen; small samples of users can identify 80% of usability problems.

In this context, it can be suggested that before creating mobile marketing efforts the points of views of consumers about this approach should be known. A permission that taken from a potential student who wants to get education means that the individual is volunteered. The other important thing is that; the distance education programme's ad message must be short and direct. The programme's content, aims, benefits etc. should be given in one sentence if it is possible. Because most of the mobile messages do not open right after the message has received to the mobile phone and the potential student candidate expose to the ad message after a while. In this context, the student can be bored while waiting the message to be opened and this situation must be considered. The experiences of the potential student candidates must be tracked and if there is something to fix then the new messages must be sent to the target audience.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the globalization effects and the developments in the information communication technology, many companies have had to change their strategies and adapted to the new business world. Marketing sector has begun to accord to these changes and has started to back out of tradition concept. In this context customer-oriented and personal message based modern marketing was emerged.

Today, there are 5 billion mobile phone users around the world which signifies that mobile phone became an important medium for the advertisers and the marketers. Because the modern marketing approaches are based on the consumer satisfaction and personalized messages, different kinds of marketing approaches has born. As one of these new approaches, mobile marketing assumes that mobile phones are important mediums of today's environment.

The mobile phones must be considered as an important medium by the distance education programmes that have more and more competitors in each passing day.

The mobile marketing approach is accepted as a crucial and modern way to reach the target audience of distance education programmes that educate different ages and classes including engineer, lawyer, housewives etc.

Mobile marketing is an approach that uses WAP technologies to reach the consumers and to categorize them. It also takes permission from the target audiences. The approach firstly started sending just SMS messages to the target audiences but after the developments on information communication technologies the approach found new styles of messages.

Besides the SMS messages, the developments on information communication technologies created some other formats of ad messages on mobile marketing. After the internet technology took part on the mobile phones, internet ads could be seen from the mobile phones.

In this context the distance education programmes' ads could be exposed easily to student candidates via mobile approaches. Although the mobile marketing approaches could provide some disadvantages right along with the advantages to distance education institutions, the approach will be preferred by more distance education institutions to get the chance of sending personalized messages to student candidates. Again in this context, the mobile marketing approach is suggested as an effective, easy and the right approach for the distance education institutions that want to convey their ad messages to the student candidates who always carry their mobile phones with them everywhere too.

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