

Marketing Strategy Implementation for the Purpose of Foreign Students Recruitment to the University of Yangon

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Abstract: This article offers the implementation strategies to recruit international students to contribute their input in order to create a sound financial injection and attract new knowledge and support for the University of Yangon after decades of educational neglect from abroad. This aims for the revival of one of the most prestigious universities in South East Asia and precedents in order to regain its reputation as a hub for foreign knowledge learning.

Keywords: recruitment, personas, inbound marketing methodology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment in 1848 the University of Yangon was contrived after the University of Oxford and was considered to be one of Asia's most notable universities. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War it was already one of the leading universities in Asia attracting scholars and international students to its facilities and premises.

Certainly the dark past of our military regime has casted a black reminder on how our own proclaimed military leaders plunged our nation into the worst performing education centers of the world. Often which were grouped with corrupt African nations and even giving way to North Korea as a trophy. Thus the University suffered heavily under the military rule that was enforced in the 1960s.

With this serious infliction onto our nation's development the situation at Yangon only began to change with the dissolution of the military junta in 2011. Since then, Yangon has regained a measure of autonomy, has received some investment for much needed repairs and equipment, and has rejoined the international academic community, launching collaborations with Oxford and other international institutions. In 2013, Yangon welcomed undergraduates back to the university for the first time since the 1980s

II. THEORY

(Theoretical perspective on the selection process and factors that influence international students)

Research on students' choices of destination countries and institutions can be divided into studies that focus on the decision-making process and those that focus on student motivations to study abroad. Research that focuses on the students' selection process is well established. In most cases, that process is viewed as containing multiple stages in which information is collected and analysed, and where decisions are made.²) The main difference between the research models is the sequence of the information gathering stages and the ways in which they overlap. With regard to the selection process among international students, Chen's Synthesis Model seems to have the most face validity. This study process model consists of the following three interplaying stages:

1. A predisposition stage, in which students assess their personal needs, collect information on studying abroad and decide to do so.
2. A search/selection/application stage, in which students gather information on available alternatives and in the end select, take a decision and submit one or more applications.

3. A choice stage, in which students, after receiving offers of admission, reconsider the available alternatives (i.e. programs, institution, city, country, visa requirements, costs, etc.) and take a final decision. The studies focusing on student motivation to study abroad are more relevant for this particular report. These studies try to explain the factors influencing students to enroll in higher education and select a particular higher education institution and course programs. These are the so-called “student choice” models. The available research focusing on domestic students has led to three different models:

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- o Status-attainment models (also called sociological models),
- o Economic models (also called econometric models), and
- o Information-processing models (also called the combined models).

The main difference between these models is in their focus on particular influencing factors.⁵ In general, the status-attainment models focus on intrinsic factors⁶, the economic models focus on extrinsic factors, and information-processing models use a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The applicability of these models for international students is limited, however, because many more factors can influence their choice process. This inherently means that student choice models for international students have to be more complex than the domestic student choice models. Several studies try to fill this gap by designing student choice models specifically for international students. What most of these models have in common is their adoption of the push and pull theory, which attempts to explain the factors affecting the decision-making of international students.

The theory argues that there are basically two forces at play: push factors and pull factors. The push factors “operate within the source country and initiate a student’s decision to undertake international study”, while the pull factors “operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students”. Note that in some cases a push factor can also be a pull factor, and vice versa. Moreover, if the country of origin does not have certain push factors, this could mean that students are keen on staying in that country. The same applies to pull factors of countries, which can also be regarded as blocking factors. Strict immigration policies are a clear example of this. The push and pull theory is applied in the following sections of this chapter to give an overview of the push and pull factors that can be at play. Where possible, empirical research on the most important factors is mentioned. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the push and pull models are rarely tested empirically. Moreover, among the models that have been empirically tested, the adopted methodology (i.e. the questionnaire, the sample taken, and included factors) differs substantially) for example in terms of the included nationalities of respondents.

The Mazzarol and Soutar study involves 2,485 students from Taiwan, India, China and Indonesia, while the Chen study is based on 140 students from China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. These differences mean that there are serious limitations to the extent the empirical results can be compared and generalized.

III. METHODOLOGY

Inbound Marketing Methodology to attract international students. The best way to turn strangers into applicants and promoters of your school



New target markets for recruitment activities are often based on anecdotal evidence. To help take the guesswork out of the process, I designed this current study based on data and research. To determine the top emerging markets for international student recruitment over the next three years, we used a mixed-methods research design to collect data from several primary and secondary sources, and cross-validated the findings in three phases:

•Secondary research

What are buyer personas? Fictional representations of your ideal customers. They are based on real data about customer demographics and online behavior, along with educated speculations about the persona; histories, motivations and concerns.

Buyer personas are created through research, surveys and interviews of your target audience. That includes a mix of applicants-both good and bad prospects and those outside of your contact database who might align with your target audience. You'll collect data that is both qualitative and quantitative to paint a picture of who your ideal customer is what they value and how your solution fits into their daily lives.

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IV. FINDINGS

Conclusion and Recommendation -A multipolar world with increased competition for students.

The increased economic importance of higher education and research has led to the creation of an international higher education market, with strong international competition for knowledge (workers). At the same time, competition also leads to the formation of strategic international collaborations, both in research and education.

This study has shown that the number of countries that are actively involved in international student recruitment has grown considerably. Many countries that previously only sent students abroad, have started to improve the quality of their own higher education and developed strategies and policies to attract international students themselves. These countries include China, South Korea, Mexico, and – to a lesser extent – Russia, Taiwan,

Thailand, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and (at least until the recent political change) Egypt. Their target countries for recruitment are often within their own (Asian, Latin American, or North African) region, and to a large extent correspond to the main target recruitment countries of the big players in the global recruitment market (the US, the UK, Australia, Germany and France). Interestingly, several of the countries studied in this report have indicated their ambition to become top destination countries for higher education and research in their respective region (e.g. Switzerland and China), or to become international higher education hubs (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand) that will contribute to raising the country's international economic competitiveness. In consequence, we can identify two distinct developments:

1. More and more countries are competing for students from many of the same group of countries, and
2. The division between recruiting and target recruitment countries is blurring since several countries are key recruitment countries for other nations, while they are also actively recruiting international students themselves. Although different rationales and strategies for international student recruitment exist in the analysed recruiting and recruitment countries, there is some overlap as well. In most countries, international student recruitment and attracting highly skilled workers are becoming more important to increase the quality of the domestic higher education system and to contribute to the further development of a knowledge economy. International students are also considered to be important as their expenditure contributes to local economic growth. Several traditional recruiting countries (such as Australia, the UK and France) have implemented stricter student visa and immigration regulations, to ensure that only highly talented students and highly skilled workers enter the country. They have also made it more difficult for international students to stay after graduation to find employment, unless the students work in fields where the country experiences labor market shortages.

The situation in the target recruitment countries is different. Many of the target countries have policies in place to reduce brain drain by trying to lure back their own students and staff after a period of study or work abroad. This is the case in Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, China and Taiwan. Student on government scholarships from these countries are often required to return after having graduated abroad.

Changing directions of mobility:

The more traditional study abroad destinations, such as the US, Europe and Australia, will likely remain to be study destinations in the foreseeable future. However, as a consequence of this multipolar world and increased international competition for students and knowledge, directions of international student mobility are beginning to change, essentially in two ways. In the first place, with the economic and political balance of power shifting east, international mobility patterns are beginning to change in this direction as well. The clearest example of this is China, which, as the second most powerful economy in the world, is rapidly becoming an interesting study destination for students from all over the globe. This development is actively encouraged by the Chinese government. At the same time, a growing number of Asian students in the US, particularly those from China, are keen to return home and start a business on completion of their studies in the US (since the US economy is stagnant while several Asian economies are growing at 8% a year). China is therefore likely to become an important competitor in the worldwide international student market, potentially followed by other countries with active recruitment policies, such as Malaysia. Secondly, the regionalization of international student mobility is accelerating. More and more students are studying abroad within their own region. This development is most obvious in Asia and Europe, but is also taking place in West-Africa and East-Africa. The increased regionalization is mainly due to (i) the improved quality of higher education in many parts of the world, which offers opportunities for good-quality education in regions where such opportunities used to be scarce, and (ii) the gradual development of regional "higher education areas" in Asia, East-Africa, West-Africa and Latin America. Following the model of the European Bologna Process, countries in these regions are collaborating or planning to remove barriers so as to enhance the mobility of students and staff, with the ultimate aim of strengthening regional economic growth and innovation. If these regional higher education areas take shape, international student mobility is likely to regionalize further. In addition, if more countries restrict immigration opportunities for foreign students/graduates in the future, more international degree-seeking students may opt to study in another country within their own region where there are regional agreements facilitating mobility (rather than in countries with strict immigration rules). By building and expanding long-term education and research collaborations with institutions in other parts of the world, such as Asia, universities can further develop exchange programs to "guarantee" a flow of incoming students from outside of their region.

- One of the most notable trends in higher education branding and marketing is that institutions dedicating far more attention to these functions than in previous years. Many universities have hired marketing professionals from the corporate world, including CMOs, and have invested significant time and money to create strong institutional brands.
- Perhaps the largest area of innovation and growth in higher education marketing and branding, as well as in recruitment, is in the online and digital space. Although there is still some doubt that institutions are using technology to its full potential, particularly with social media and other emerging platforms.
- Among the most important tools for social and online marketing is an effective and intuitive website, which should be considered the "ultimate brand statement" for an institution. Websites often feature elements and layouts so as to streamline and highlight content, including navigation bars, engaging visuals such as slideshows, and prominent "call to action" buttons that encourage students to apply, for example.
- Despite increased digital activity, a recent survey found that the most effective marketing strategies for universities are nevertheless events based and involve direct interaction with potential students. Radio ads, asking current students or alumni for applicant referrals, and online college fairs were deemed least effective, while the most effective method of outreach were open houses and campus visit days for universities.
- Recruitment strategies in higher education increasingly focus on international students and nontraditional and adult learners.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build your brand in target markets abroad
- Adapt your website & communications to mobile devices
- Use a variety of communications methods
- Build strong international relations early with key international prospects
- Involve parents/ relatives of students in the communication flow
- Make funding and payment methods easily available
- Simplify a co-herent bureaucracy process

Ways to strengthen your recruiting using benchmarks

While benchmarks are very helpful in terms of seeing how you compare in various enrollment areas, how can you take those numbers and turn them into actionable strategies?

Here are 10 ways you can use these benchmarks to enact meaningful change at your campus.

- Understand your own data.

In order for any benchmarks to have meaning, the first step is to understand the data for your own campus. If your campus wants to enroll 100 more new students next year, it is important to identify the current opportunities for improvement at various funnel stages. I often suggest that campuses add a column next to the tables in the Noel-Levitz report to include their campus-specific data to identify opportunities for improvement.

- Set goals for improvement.

Once you have identified the funnel stages that need attention, determine what is realistic in terms of improvement. For example, if a school with 5,000 inquiries improves its conversion rate from 15 percent to 16 percent, the end result is 50 more applications. How many more enrolled students could you have if you reduced your summer melt by 1-2 percent each year until you reach your goal? This incremental approach to enrollment growth is much more meaningful for campuses and often leads to a more focused recruitment strategy.

- Track funnel rates by application type for your campus.

Paper applications will yield higher than online applications, and that campus applications will yield higher than applications provided by outside agencies. These findings do not suggest that you should eliminate other ways to apply. However, they do mean that you need to understand your own applicant pool in order to make accurate projections regarding new student enrollment.

- Track funnel rates by geography.

In-state students will enroll at higher rates than those coming from out of state. Even if most of your students come from in-state, tracking funnel rates by county or region can also refine and focus your recruitment efforts. Furthermore, if you see an increase in out-of-state applicants, then you can project enrollees much more accurately by applying the yield rate for out-of-state applicants instead of the overall yield.

- Develop a plan to get more applications completed.

Start by understanding what is missing from these applicants. If it is grades or scores, I encourage the counselors to call the high schools directly to ask for this information. I often find that schools require “unnecessary” items in the application process such as health forms, residence hall applications, and so on. The only required items should be those things that provide information on the student’s admissibility. Other forms can be requested from the student once they have been offered admission.

Build a robust campus visit program that targets students at various funnel stages.

Students who visit a campus yield at higher rates than those who do not. Many campuses have had success with the following strategies:

Open house programs targeting junior and senior inquiries

Admitted student days

Individual campus tours/visits

Scholarship recognition events

Ensure that your key messages include a focus on academics/outcomes.

This should include specifics on internship opportunities, graduate school placements, job opportunities, etc. Cost and academic reputation continue to be the top two factors in the college search process, so providing this information early and often will keep more students moving through the funnel.

Use an application fee (typically between \$25 – \$35).

Campuses charging a fee of less than \$35 had higher yield rates than those not charging a fee. Also, consider waiving the application fee for your online applicants or for other targeted groups (alumni referrals, for example).

For private institutions, ask prospective students to pay a tuition deposit to secure their spot in the upcoming entering class.

Institutions with the highest yield rates are charging a deposit fee (as opposed to no fee) but keeping that fee less than \$200.

Remember that today's prospective students will enter your recruitment funnel at a time and channel of their choosing.

Your recruitment plan should target students in each channel and at each stage in order to maximize enrollment.

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