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# 7 Steps to Building Your Education Outreach Campaign

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## **About DeHavilland Associates**

DeHavilland Associates is a consulting and communications firm that helps its corporate, nonprofit, and association clients understand and connect with the K-12 community. The company designs, manages, and evaluates outreach campaigns and partnership programs for its clients and creates original initiatives to help educators and education stakeholders establish and strengthen dialogue for the benefit of public education.

For more information, visit [www.dehavillandassociates.com](http://www.dehavillandassociates.com).

## **About the Business/Education Partnership Forum**

Created and managed by DeHavilland Associates, the Business/Education Partnership Forum is an online clearinghouse for anyone interested in learning how to build effective business/education partnerships. This clearinghouse offers news and announcements, links to resources, a directory of organizations involved in business/education partnerships, and a monthly newsletter.

For more information, visit [www.biz4ed.org](http://www.biz4ed.org).

## **About the Effective Education Partnerships Conference**

The Effective Education Partnerships Conference (EEPC) is an annual two-day meeting for the practitioners of business/education partnerships, including chambers, business coalitions, individual businesses, school and district leaders, and others interested in hearing case studies and effective practices from others in the field. EEPC will be held July 10-11, 2008 in Fairfax, VA.

For more information, visit [www.eepc2008.com](http://www.eepc2008.com).

# 7 Steps to Building Your Outreach Campaign

*A proven approach to planning that accommodates the needs of education and campaign sponsors*

The best education outreach campaigns don't just happen: they result from careful, deliberate planning in which an organization outlines its goals, identifies the resources it will allocate to reach those goals, and then prepares to achieve its goals by using its designated resources and the best market information available. One approach to intelligent program planning is presented in this white paper.

The process outlined here assumes that the sponsoring organization is driven in part by a desire for a short-term return in the area of stakeholder relations, and that it does not have the luxury of investing in education outreach solely for altruistic purposes or expectations of workforce development at the macro level. In the end, this focus on short-term returns is beneficial to the education system: immediate returns warrant a greater investment as well as a system of accountability, two things that are inarguably in the interest of the education market.

## Step 1: Identify Your Stakeholders

The best programs start with a sincere desire to help students, and certainly students (along with other members of the education market, including parents, teachers, and administrators) should be kept front and center when thinking about any kind of education outreach program.

Programs driven in whole or in part by a desire for improved stakeholder relations, however, need to consider other audiences at the earliest stages of the planning process. These may include:

- Customers
- Investors/the financial community
- Employees and unions
- Vendors and partners
- Legislators and regulators
- Influencers, including academia and the media

As one example, cable networks tend to focus on three audiences (in addition to education) when establishing their education plans: partners, or the cable operators

who distribute their programming to individual markets; legislators and regulators, since cable is a regulated market and such relationships are important to the industry; and the media, since networks want greater visibility to benefit their programming.

Once you have a clear picture of the audiences with whom you'd like to communicate, you've established critical context for the development of a successful program.

## Step 2: Conduct an Asset Inventory

It may seem counterintuitive to think about which assets you can incorporate into your program before you've even designed the program. But if you're interested in maximizing your impact on education, you can only do so by using the resources that are most plentiful and available to you, and that will affect program design.

You can start building your asset inventory by asking the following questions:

- What assets have been provided to launch and maintain this campaign? Financial resources, manpower, and partnerships should all be included.
- What does your company produce or provide? What is it respected for? Products or services can be a key component or driver of an effective outreach initiative. This could be air time for broadcasters, hardware for tech companies, and so on.
- What strengths does your company have? Do you have strong brand equity, an excellent distribution network, or some other strength that may be considered?
- What intellectual property (copyrights, trademarks, patents, etc.) does your company hold? Can it be used to your advantage?
- What sort of workforce does your firm employ? Where are employees located, and what are their skill sets? Are there opportunities to institute volunteering programs, or tap into existing programs?

- What relationships do you have that could be utilized here? Do you have strategic partners, sway within trade associations, access to industry experts, or agreements with celebrities or other prominent personalities?
- Which other departments may have resources you can utilize? If responsibility for some of your target audiences falls within the purview of other departments (such as legislators and regulators being of interest to your government relations team), you should consider talking with them to see what they may be willing to contribute to your efforts.
- What channels (online, mass media, etc.) does your company use for marketing and communications? Can you take advantage of existing campaigns to gain exposure using current communications initiatives?

Once you've targeted stakeholder groups and identified available assets, you're ready to define the outcomes you want to see in return for your investment.

## Step 3: Define Your Organizational Goals for the Program

The way to ensure a strong and extended commitment to education—in other words, the way to put yourself in a position to make a real and sustained impact on the lives of students and teachers—is to show a clear return on the resources your organization invests. You must therefore identify the benefits your organization wants to realize as a result of its efforts before being able to focus on the needs of the education market.

First, consider the communications issues facing your organization. Do you have a hard time finding qualified job applicants? Is your reputation strong in each of your stakeholder communities? Is there a need to strengthen your brand or positioning?

Using these issues as background, take your list of targeted stakeholder groups and for each audience, list the results you'd like to achieve. If employees were one of your stakeholder audiences, you may list “build morale,” “help build professional skills,” or “increase future pool of applicants.” You may also have more specific targets, such as “get company listed as one of the top 100 places to work in America.” Make this list for each stakeholder group, and

recognize that your goals don't have to flow exclusively from your education program. Being listed as one of the top 100 places to work, for example, won't happen solely as a result of your education efforts.

After you've listed goals for each individual stakeholder group, look at the lists together: there will likely be overlap that can form the basis of your primary campaign goals. These may include items like “improve image of the organization,” “reinforce brand strengths,” or “support launch of new product.” Weigh the importance of each goal (whether cross-audience or single audience) and prioritize your list.

And remember: While you may have some specific goals in mind, it's not necessary to quantify your goals at this stage in your planning efforts; that will come later.

## Step 4: Analyze the Education Market

The K-12 education market is enormous, with more than 100,000 schools across the country serving close to 50 million students in 13 grade levels. How can you confidently hone in on a targeted audience and build a program around their needs?

You can start by focusing on a more manageable slice of the education market. Consider some or all of the following filters:

- **Organizational objectives**—Knowing which issues you've decided to tackle can help you narrow down your target audience substantially. If you've decided to focus on workforce development issues, you're likely going to work with a middle or high school audience. If employee engagement is a priority, you'll probably want to provide volunteer opportunities to your people—which means that programs must be within driving distance of your employee centers.
- **Available resources**—The types of resources you're willing to contribute through your education outreach efforts may help you narrow down your target audience. Donated products in particular may have a limited audience.
- **Geography**—Which geographic markets does your company serve—do you have a national, regional, or local footprint? Are your employees located across the country, or concentrated in a few major

markets? Geographic considerations may help you determine which market areas to focus on.

- **Industry**—Your industry may provide a focus: banks, for example, might focus on financial literacy efforts in schools. Be careful not to reflexively concentrate your efforts in this way, however; many companies have effective programs that are not tied to the industry in which they operate.
- **Brand**—Many things about your brand, such as identity and perceived areas of strength, may lead you to a targeted focus area. Volvo, for example, a brand defined by the concept of safety, might do well to center on safety as a core tenet of their efforts.

Once you've narrowed your potential market to a manageable size, concentrating on a specific geographic region, subject area, and/or set of grade levels, you'll have a more reasonable job ahead of you in terms of market analysis. Now it comes down to good old research skills: taking the time to understand your market segment by reviewing current information and talking to experts in those areas, including association representatives along with administrators and educators in the areas in which you'd like to participate. As you find educators and experts you can rely on, ask for their ongoing advice, and form a council to help guide your planning.

Once you feel that you've developed an understanding of your chosen market segment, it's finally time to develop your campaign plan.

## Step 5: Design Your Program

You've identified your stakeholder groups, available resources, and organizational goals, and you've identified and learned about the specific segment of the education market you'd like to serve. Now it's time to take all of these pieces and design your outreach program.

At this stage, you're likely not approaching the project as a blank slate: with each step, you've undoubtedly started to connect some dots that will help guide you as you structure your program. You've identified areas of need in your target segment, and had some initial thoughts on how your resources and objectives line up. You can take these concepts for validation to some of the specialists you spoke with in Step 4, and specifically identify the educational objectives that will form the foundation of your final program design.

From this point on, it's an iterative process, whereby you'll tweak the campaign design and revisit your stakeholder list, asset inventory, and organizational goals as the reality of the program comes into focus. Ultimately you will have optimized all of these campaign components to generate the best results and the most effective use of your resources.

## Step 6: Establish an Evaluation Plan

Now that you know what your program will look like, and you've identified goals for both your organization and your education program, you'll need to set a specific definition of success for each objective, determine how that success will be tracked and measured, and establish benchmarks so you have a defined starting point.

For example, if you set a goal of "improved reading abilities" for the 6th graders with whom you're working, you need to identify which facets of reading (enjoyment, comprehension, vocabulary, a composite measurement) you want to measure, identify how they would be measured (standardized test, student survey), what would determine success (a 10% increase in test scores or a boost in enjoyment ratings through a student survey), and where those students are starting out, which would require an assessment or survey to capture initial data.

You should also establish specific criteria and measurements for your corporate objectives; these may come in the form of surveys (employee satisfaction surveys for example), various measurements (\$100,000 in products or billable hours donated, or 2,000 hours volunteered), or other measurements (provided ten employees with leadership opportunities through this program to encourage skill-building).

Establishing measurable objectives and then benchmarking and tracking your results is essential. You'll have data demonstrating that your work is making a difference in the lives of students, which will drive continued support and participation from your education partners. Similarly, you'll be able to clearly demonstrate the value of your campaign internally, which will increase your likelihood of continued (or increased) internal support. And this data can lead to a cycle of continuous improvement, allowing you to regularly improve your efforts and results for all parties.

## Step 7: Establish a Communications Plan

The final step in this process is to establish a plan for communicating the merits and results of your campaign with all appropriate stakeholder groups. Establishing a plan for communicating with current company stakeholders should be straightforward: since you have already established channels for reaching these groups, your planning should focus primarily on messaging and delivery format—questions such as audience identification and channels have already been answered for you.

The education market, however, is a different story, made more complicated by the fact that your communications plan will be dependent on the format and goals of your campaign. (You'll have different goals and use different communication channels when establishing a local volunteer effort versus a national campaign designed to promote a free curriculum, for example.)

With that in mind, here are a few suggestions to begin your planning process:

- For local outreach and for programs involving volunteers, personal contact with schools and school districts are irreplaceable.
- For national campaigns, direct mail is an effective tool, and the education market has some of the best compiled lists available.

- Partnerships, particularly those with national associations or other organizations, can be very effective both for credibility and message dissemination.
- Online marketing is growing in importance in the education market; however, just like everyone else, teachers strongly dislike unsolicited emails.
- Since every campaign is different, incorporate direct response elements (online registrations, reply cards, etc.) wherever possible so that you can gauge which channels are most effective for you.

By taking a thoughtful and thorough approach to campaign design, you'll ensure not only that you've brought as much to education as you could in as effective a manner as possible, you'll also maximize your opportunities to build goodwill among all stakeholder groups—a move that will likely drive future program continuation and growth, benefiting the education market and your organization.

*Brett Pawlowski is President of DeHavilland Associates, a consulting firm specializing in campaign design and communications and evaluation strategy in the education outreach market. He has spent several years working with organizations on their education outreach strategy and is a recognized voice in the industry.*



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