Tools for Marketing Your Education Outreach Program

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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.

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.

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.

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Reaching teachers and other members of the education market can be the most challenging part of building an education initiative. The education system is subject to specific buying and adoption cycles, teachers and administrators are pressed for time, there are few mass communication channels, and marketing efforts must reflect a true understanding of the market landscape (since technology limitations, product requirements, and other factors can affect your results). This paper introduces primary outreach channels and helps you determine which channels to use based on your program’s characteristics.

I. Direct Mail

Direct mail has historically been the most-used marketing channel for materials promoted directly to teachers. There are many reasons why: the list market is strong, offering current and nearly complete coverage of the market; it is cost-effective relative to other channels; it is measurable; and marketers can get hard data on the effectiveness of marketing approaches through split-run tests.

There are two types of lists in any market:

- Response lists, made up of people who have taken some kind of action, such as purchasing a product or requesting information
- Compiled lists, built by collecting names of people in specific groups through research efforts (i.e., list members took no action to join the list).

In the education market, the universe of response lists is small, with limited selects (criteria such as grade level or subject area that can be used to refine the list) available. In contrast, the compiled list category is robust, with three companies regularly gathering current information through market research and offering a wide array of selection criteria.

Of course, as in any direct response effort, house lists—made up of teachers who have requested information from you, participated in your campaigns in the past, or who are current users, will likely be your best lists. As you begin marketing your programs, be sure your data collection capabilities are strong so that you can begin building your own proprietary lists.

Whether you’re promoting a local or national initiative, and whether that initiative involves a one-time transactional relationship (requesting free classroom resources) or a long-term relationship, you will likely benefit from including direct mail in your marketing mix.

II. Partnerships

Strictly speaking, partnerships are not really a channel; however, because they can provide unique access to valuable and proprietary channels for reaching educators and others, they have been included in this report.

Partnerships can be formed with a wide range of organizations interested in K-12 education, including:

- **Associations**—There are many state and national associations for educators and administrators in the K-12 market covering almost every facet of education. Many of these associations are very active and experienced in developing partnerships and are interested in contributions to the organization or member benefits, such as free or discounted resources and services. In return, associations can help you reach their members through various channels; they can also offer benefits such as endorsements or access to their network of experts and opinion leaders.
- **Government**—Many government agencies include public outreach as part of their missions and have proven receptive to partnerships that help them fulfill that mandate. In addition to providing resources and access to their own communication channels, government agencies may contribute financially to campaigns under the right circumstances.
• **Unions**—Unions offer access to a huge population of teachers, and have become more active in partnership-driven campaigns over the past few years.

• **Education Industry Vendors**—Vendors in the education market are interested in marketing and sales, and initiatives that allow them to position their products in a visible and credible way or that help them sell more products can open the door to financial support, product giveaways, and access to customers through various channels.

• **Educational Media**—In addition to PR and advertising opportunities, which are addressed later in this paper, educational newspapers and magazines are generally receptive to the idea of partnerships that allow for the creation of special reports, open up new distribution opportunities, or strengthen their brand, such as being listed as a media partner for an awards initiative.

• **Nonprofits, Foundations, and Businesses**—There are any number of nonprofits and other organizations who invest in K-12 communications as part of their public outreach or corporate communications mandate. They can provide access to expertise, resources, promotional opportunities, or endorsements in exchange for contributions or promotional considerations.

What are the key elements of a successful partnership? The critical concepts are “win-win,” “communication,” and “return on investment.” Partnerships must provide value to both parties in order to make sense; based on their respective interests, that could involve sales or other revenue, visibility, member benefits, credibility, or other resources that help them fulfill their objectives. Communication is critical: each party must be clear on what is expected of it, and is responsible for disseminating that information to all who will play a role in meeting those obligations. And each side must have specific ways of measuring results to determine success and interest in continuing the relationship.

### III. Online Marketing

While the education market traditionally lags behind the business-to-business and consumer markets in its acceptance and adoption of new technology, Internet-based marketing is an emerging force in this industry, and one can expect it to continue increasing in importance and impact as time goes by.

Some techniques to consider as you build your digital marketing strategy include:

• **Web Presence**—Having a professional website is a prerequisite for any online marketing efforts. Users need to be able to access information on your materials or campaign, learn more about the organization behind it, and easily request more information or register to participate.

• **Search Engine Optimization**—Search engines are a major source of new website visitors; therefore, the placement of your website in search results is extremely important. Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, refers to making your site as accessible and relevant as possible, and involves techniques such as posting new, relevant content on a regular basis and making your site easy for the search engines to catalog.

• **Pay Per Click Marketing**—If your website does not appear near the top of the page for any given search term, you may want to pay for premium placement by launching a pay per click (PPC) campaign. These ads appear near the top of relevant search results and link directly to a web page of your choosing (note that many PPC marketers create different destination pages, or landing pages, based on the search terms selected). In contrast to advertising, which operates on an “impressions” model, you only pay for your PPC when someone clicks on it (hence the name), with cost per click determined by how competitive the search term is, and where you want to position your ad.

• **Banner Ads and Sponsorships**—If there are websites that serve the audience you wish to reach, you may consider purchasing banner ads or sponsoring pages or sections of those sites. While banner ads and sponsorship notices allow users to click through to a site or page of your choosing, they generally offer a much lower click-through rate than PPC ads. Still, the opportunity to build awareness among a key audience, coupled with this click-through capability, makes banner ads and sponsorships worth considering.

• **Listings**—There are several websites that serve as directories for teachers interested in learning about new teaching resources, grants, and other opportunities. Listings on these sites are almost always free.

• **Email Marketing**—For those who wish to prospect through email, some list companies have built
opt-in email lists of educators and will transmit your message for a (generally high) fee. Marketers wishing to use email typically find best results by collecting and using addresses from users and website visitors.

• **Word of Mouth**—The Internet encourages dialogue among participants who hold common interests; this dialogue occurs in various forms, including blogs, bulletin boards, listservs, and more. By joining these conversations as an active and sincere participant, you will gain some level of exposure for your organization and, more importantly, you will gain invaluable real-market insight from people active in your area.

Online marketing offers substantial advantages over other channels in both measurability and cost, and can serve as an effective component of an education marketing campaign.

**IV. Conferences**

Most conferences in the education market are hosted by associations and occur in the fall or spring. Conferences can be found for most content areas (National Science Teachers Association, National Council of Social Studies) or for specific professional groups (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Association of Elementary School Principals). Many associations have chapters at the state level which also host conferences.

Those interested in exposure at conferences can usually find opportunities to exhibit and may be able to present if they offer a credible and non-commercial perspective on something of interest to the profession. While exhibiting offers greater exposure over the course of the conference, presenting a session offers your staff members the opportunity to appear authoritative and credible, which will certainly help you position your work in a positive light.

While it can be costly to exhibit at a national conference, given exhibition expenses, travel, and manpower, conferences offer a rare opportunity to talk face-to-face with the some of the most active and dedicated professionals in a specific subject matter or administrative area.

**V. PR and Advertising**

There are dozens of national publications in the education market dedicated to teaching, administration, and the business of education, and hundreds—if not thousands—of newsletters and bulletins produced at the state level for members of state and local unions and professional organizations. Given the reach and targeting capabilities of this channel, you should consider a publication strategy that includes PR and advertising while developing your communications plan.

Given the targeted nature of these publications, it is typically simple to identify those that align with the focus of your outreach efforts in order to build a “pitch list” for your PR efforts. If you wish to simply announce a new product or program, many publications offer product reviews as well as announcements of grants, new programs, and the like. If you’re more interested in editorial coverage, just keep reader interests in mind: publications generally welcome article ideas and submissions that highlight and explore a current issue in the profession or that offer practical information such as case histories, “how-to” articles, and the like.

Remember that the real advantage to press coverage is not the initial placement (although you may see activity from an article or product review), but rather the long-term use of that coverage in your future marketing efforts. Including quotes or copies of articles builds credibility and increases response from all your other efforts, making press coverage one of the most valuable market assets available to you.

While advertising does not typically offer the same impact and credibility as press coverage, it does offer control that PR does not. When purchasing advertising, you control the message, placement, appearance, timing, and call to action, and that makes advertising worth considering as part of your marketing mix.

**VI. Telemarketing**

Telemarketing to educators is a widely accepted, and generally welcome, approach to marketing. It can generate response rates nearly double those of direct mail, albeit at a comparably higher price, and has applications for both fee-based and free education offerings. It also allows marketers to gather immediate feedback and, if necessary, shift tactics or put a hold on a campaign before too many resources have been invested.

You can use telemarketing as a relationship-building tool through which experienced representatives establish a dialogue regarding materials or programs that are complex
or that require a significant financial investment. It is also valuable when time is a factor, as telemarketing firms can move quickly to promote limited-term opportunities to identified lists, or when the need for high response rates outweighs the higher rates.

Lists for telemarketing can be rented from the same companies who provide mailing lists to the industry, or can be obtained by your telemarketing vendor as part of their overall responsibilities.

Putting It All Together

With all of these options available to you, how do you build the optimal mix of marketing elements for your campaign? Consider the following questions as you build your promotional plan:

• What have you learned from tracking your efforts in previous years?
• How are similar or competitive initiatives being promoted? What types of marketing initiatives do they use on a regular basis, and why?
• How complex is your initiative? Can it be easily explained in a letter or postcard, or does it require a conversation?
• What do you want your audience to do as a result of your marketing? How much of a personal commitment do prospects have to make?
• Is this a local, regional, or national initiative?
• What is your budget? What non-financial investments (manpower, expertise, etc.) are available to invest in your campaign?

The most important thing to consider when designing your marketing strategy is accountability: identifying your desired results and tracking the contribution of each component of your campaign to those end results. By monitoring the effectiveness of each of the elements of your current campaign, you’ll be building a treasure trove of information that will fuel increased returns on your investment for years to come.

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