

A Service Opportunity for Your Consideration:

School Principals and Their Growing Marketing Responsibilities

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Abstract

This paper outlines a research study conducted at the local level to provide an example for your replication in your community. Specifically, we conducted primary research with two local school districts to determine the existing level of marketing understanding and receptivity amongst their school principals. From these research results, we have a baseline of their current knowledge and can plan specific professional development training and seminars to provide these local school districts in the future. Your replication of this study will give you a similar service opportunity in your community.

Introduction

Over a decade ago, the *Clearing House*, a publication with an audience of elementary and middle-school educators, published an article which posed the following question to its readers: “With the growth in school choice, will principals become marketers?” (see Robenstine 2000). Advancing to the present day, we know the answer to that question – YES. A number of authors have looked at this issue and have arrived at the same conclusion (see, for example, Oplatka, Hemsley-Brown, and Foskett 2002; Bagley 2006; Berkeihiser).

Indeed, leaders of public schools find themselves in an increasingly competitive environment as today’s consumers (i.e., families) have more educational choices, including: (a) charter schools, (b) private schools, (c) online schools, (d) home schools, (e) early college programs, and others. Gone are the days when the local public school educated all of the local children. Even within local school districts, specialized schools and programs are being created which attract students from across the district, including Academies for Arts, Science, Technology, International Baccalaureate programs, and other options. School principals are being challenged to market their schools in this increasingly competitive environment (see Bagley 2006). However, most school principal have little, if any, training in Marketing. By and large, school principals are trained teachers and educational administrators. They are being asked to become more marketing-oriented while lacking formalized training in the discipline. They can benefit from our assistance.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a research study conducted at the local level to provide an example for your replication in your community. Specifically, we conducted primary research with two local school districts to determine the existing level of marketing understanding and receptivity amongst their school principals. From these research results, we have a baseline of their current knowledge and can plan specific professional development training and seminars to provide these local school districts in the future. Your replication of this study will give you a similar service opportunity in your community. As academic colleagues, we are tasked with bringing together our teaching, research, and service efforts. School principals in your communities are looking for assistance. We invite you to take our study methodology and survey instruments back to your community and offer your assistance to school administrators in your markets.

Study Methodology

Securing School District Support

Conversations with school district personnel led to a recognition of the importance of school principals becoming ‘chief marketing officers’ for their individual schools while the district superintendent (and others) serves as ‘chief marketing officer’ for the district’s portfolio of schools. It was recognized that there was variation in school marketing efforts. The district wanted to improve the sensitivity level of all school principals to the importance of assuming a more active role in the marketing of their individual schools.

It is very important to secure top management support of such an effort. Their support will validate the need of school principals to become more active marketers. District approval will act as a ‘blessing’ or approval of the project to aid in data collection. Finally, their support of the project will lead to your ability to deliver specialized training in school marketing to help them fulfill the increasing responsibility of school administrators.

Survey Instrument

We found no existing scales to meet our needs to determine the existing level of marketing knowledge and sensitivity. So, we simply started with a Principles of Marketing text and developed questions which, in our minds, captured the essence of such a survey course presentation. We also made the decision to use Importance-Performance analysis in our study. That is, we measured the perceived importance of marketing activities while concurrently asking the school principals to rate their recent performance on the identical items. The following rating scales were used:

Importance	Performance
<u>Please tell us how important each item is to your work as a school principal.</u>	<u>Please tell us how satisfied you are with your school’s efforts to complete each action.</u>
1 = Not Important at All	1 = Very Dissatisfied
2 = Not That Important	2 = Dissatisfied
3 = Neutral	3 = Neutral
4 = Somewhat Important	4 = Satisfied
5 = Very Important	5 = Very Satisfied

The following statements were provided for both an IMPORTANCE and PERFORMANCE score:

1. Remaining student-focused.
2. Striving to meet the needs of your students (and their families).
3. Planning for the short-term success of your students and school.
4. Planning for the long-term success of your students and school.
5. Researching the needs of your students (and their families).

6. Monitoring your operating environments for opportunities and threats.
7. Helping move families through their school choice decision-making processes.
8. Dividing students into groups to serve them more effectively.
9. Seeking to create a unique position for our brand.
10. Creating different services or programs for students with different needs.
11. Monitoring the perceptions our families have of the educational experience realized by the student.
12. Developing different time commitment expectations for different students.
13. Monitoring operational costs to ensure cost competitiveness.
14. Using a variety of communication methods to reach your students (and their families)
15. Seeking to develop a consistent message regarding your school.
16. Using your teachers and staff members to tell your story on a one-to-one basis with your students and families.
17. Using unpaid mass media (television news, newspapers, etc) to tell your story to your community.
18. Seeking to maximize the access to educational services for your students.
19. Seeking to enhance the customer service experience for your students (and their families)
20. Seeking a long-term relationship with your students (and their families).
21. Developing mutually-beneficial relationships with distribution partners and service providers.
22. Developing mutually-beneficial relationships with supporters/sponsors.

Data Collection

Your local school district likely has, from time to time, scheduled meetings for all school principals. In our case, we were invited to attend such a meeting to talk about the impending study, its usage, and to make an appeal for participation. The district then had its principals complete the web-based survey instrument in use right at that meeting, thus vastly improving response rates. From this data, we are now positioned to provide specialized training for district personnel.

Presenting the Study Results: Importance-Performance Analysis

In general, studies which focus on the assessment of outcomes tend to focus solely on importance of outcomes or performance toward standards and thus do not provide a complete picture of current activities and mission fulfillment. Importance-Performance Analysis involves measuring the IMPORTANCE and the PERFORMANCE of a stimulus (such as a list of marketing actions, outcomes, etc) and then creating a graphical display of the results on a two dimensional (i.e., 2x2) "action grid," such as presented in **Figure One**. This graph serves two important purposes. First, it offers an easily-interpreted visual display of the results of the analysis. Second, and perhaps more important, it provides a basis for strategy formulation.

Figure One

Importance-Performance Grid

HIGH Importance	A. Concentrate Here	B. Keep Up the Good Work
LOW Importance	C. Low Priority	D. Possible Overkill
	LOW Performance	HIGH Performance

Looking at **Figure One**, you see the upper half of the matrix represents stimulus dimensions which are considered to be of greater importance while the bottom half are those dimensions considered less important. The right-hand side of the matrix contains attributes for which performance is at higher levels whereas the left-hand side of the matrix contains items with lower performance levels. The 2x2 Importance-Performance grid presented contains four quadrants:

1. **Concentrate Here** – High Importance, Low Performance
2. **Keep Up the Good Work** - High Importance, High Performance
3. **Low Priority** – Low Importance, Low Performance
4. **Possible Overkill** - Low Importance, High Performance

Importance-Performance Analysis has been used to evaluate outcomes in a variety of industries. For example, it has been applied in positioning restaurants, business school education delivery, professional association membership offerings, perceptions of bank services, and many more. This method is robust and works in a variety of operational settings. Further, software programs that utilize either means or top-box percentages to create quadrant charts, bi-plots, correspondence maps, and multi-dimensional scaling maps have been developed to explore importance-performance relationships.

Study Results

For the purposes of this paper, we believe it is most appropriate to NOT share our district-wide results with you. Rather, our interest here is to help YOU be of service to your local school district. We can tell you, however, that principals in our districts are very marketing-oriented and very open to increasing marketing efforts. If we were farmers, we would say that we've found 'very fertile soil' in which to plant a program of broad-based marketing by school principals in our community.

Our Challenge to You Looking Ahead

We invite you to replicate our study in your community with your local school administrators as part of your service contribution to your university and community stakeholders.

- Talk with your local school district to see if you can be of service.
- Take our survey instrument and establish your local baseline measures of your local school principals and marketing.

- Use Importance-Performance Analysis to present your data to your audience.
- Develop specific professional development sessions to your local school principals to assist in their ongoing development as ‘chief marketing officers’ for their schools.
- Come back to Southeast INFORMS next year and present your work as a service opportunity for our consideration so we can learn from you and replicate your work.

References

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