

Critical Success Factors in the Marketing of an Educational Institution - A comparison of institutional and student perspective's

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Tim Mazzarol

School of Management, Curtin University of Technology

Geoffrey N. Soutar

Graduate School of Management, University of Western Australia

Education - from public good to commercial activity

Education includes a vast range of processes and activities and is difficult to define. On one level, the term can be used to describe the 'whole process of bringing up children and young adults to take place in society' (McLaren, 1974:81). At another level it can be used as a synonym for instruction and training. Traditional approaches to education were dominated by religious or social concerns that viewed learning as a means to either understand God or gain social advancement (Corwin, 1975:11). Aristotle, for example, strongly advocated state control over education so that "the citizen should be moulded to the form of government under which he lives" (Durant, 1962:91).

During the 19th century, the dual influences of the French and industrial revolutions laid the foundations for a system of mass education. The British *Education Act, 1870* established compulsory schooling for all children to the age of thirteen (Thomson, 1975:135). Within Australia, all pre-Federation colonial parliaments enacted similar legislation between 1870 and 1890 making education at the primary level compulsory, secular and free (Clark, 1969:156-157). Such developments provided education with the status of a 'public good' and any move to commercialise either it or its institutional providers was general viewed as distasteful, even unethical. However, this status was to be gradually challenged over the course of the 20th century as the demand for education grew.

Following the Second World War (1939-1945), the number of students completing High School and continuing on to further education grew dramatically throughout the world (Hobsbawm, 1994 :295). For example, in the United States, the number of students enrolled in higher education increased from 1,508 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1950, to 3,643 per 100,000 inhabitants by 1969 (Giesbrecht, 1972 :302). This pattern was the same in other developed nations. Prior to 1939 there were fewer than 150,000 university students studying in Germany, France and the United Kingdom combined. Between 1960 and 1980 the number of university students in Europe tripled or quadrupled (Hobsbawm, 1994 :295-296).

Demand for education, particularly higher education, was driven by expectations of its ability to raise the status of the graduate, both economically and socially. For people in less developed countries, limited access to education in their own countries led to a significant rise in the number of international students studying overseas. Between 1960 and 1970 the average growth in international student flows was around 9 per cent, and continued at 6 per cent from 1970 to 1980 (Hughes, 1988 :227).

Veblen (1957) was one of the first to note a shifting emphasis within education from a 'public good' to a marketable service. According to Veblen, the universities and colleges in the United States were being evaluated not on educational quality or teaching outcomes, but on "business criteria". Courses and programs within institutions were required to be financially solvent, while the advertising and public relations activities of schools, colleges and universities were increasing (Corwin, 1975).

During the 1980's, declining birth rates and increasing operating costs led many education institutions to take a greater interest in marketing than had previously been the case (Edel, 1987; Fielden, Hilton and Motes, 1993). Education was seen as simply another service industry that operated within competitive markets and required marketing strategies to ensure its success in attracting both domestic and international students (Bassin, 1985; Huber, 1992). In the same period the service sectors of most developed economies were expanding rapidly and transforming services into the most important activities of modern economic life.

The Outlook for the Next Millennium

The Twentieth Century saw the emergence education as a major international industry. Can we expect to have the growth in international student flows continue into this century and will education be delivered in the same manner as become common in the 1950s? The answer to these questions is likely to be both yes and no. There is some evidence that annual average growth rates in student flows have begun to slow from the 1980s, even though total enrolments have increased substantially. Projections for the level of demand in countries such as China and India over the first two decades of the Twenty First Century are also optimistic. However, the future is likely to see a much more competitive environment, with increasing sophistication among both student consumers and institutional marketers. Delivery methods will change as a result of new education technologies that will permit students to study at a foreign institution through the Internet or at a local branch campus without traveling overseas. There will be more 'niche' marketing, with greater specialization of courses and programs designed to service specific target markets.

Education institutions that wish to maintain a competitive edge will need to adapt to and embrace the multiple trends of technology-based delivery, offshore delivery and increasing commercialization. They will need to realize that the role of education institutions, particularly universities, has changed. Throughout the world, the trend has been for universities to shift from elite to mass systems that offer almost universal access. However, as government budgets tighten, the pressure for self-funding has grown. Universities have become more vocationally oriented and less willing to pursue 'pure' research, while the role of academic staff has shifted

from tenured ‘ivory tower’ to part-time ‘process-worker.’ The emergence of strong industry-academe links has also seen the emergence of new types of institution, such as the German *Fachhochschulen*, some of which are outside the conventional university system and operated by industry.

The Nature of Education as a Marketable Service

Like many other “professional services,” education has tended to ignore marketing (Morgan, 1991). Despite this neglect, education remains a service capable as any other of being discussed in terms of marketing theory. In doing this, an important starting point is the classification of education as a marketable service.

Lovelock (1983) offered a useful conceptual foundation for research into services marketing. This involves five criteria, each of which can be examined on four dimensions. Using this framework, it is possible to describe education services as having the following characteristics:

1. **The nature of the service act:** the education service act is directed as people (their minds rather than their bodies). It is primarily ‘people based’ rather than ‘equipment based’ (Thomas, 1978), and involved largely intangible actions (Shostack, 1977);
2. **The relationship with the customer:** Education frequently involves a lengthy and formal relationship with the client and a continuous delivery of the service. Students have what Lovelock (1983) refers to as a “membership” relationship with the service provider. This offers the service provider an opportunity to develop strong client loyalty and enhanced client service features.
3. **The level of customization and judgment in services delivery:** Some services require greater customization and judgment on the part of service providers than others. The extent to which education services are customized is variable. Small tutorials or individual supervision are obviously more highly customized than mass lectures. In most cases the extent to which the service provider exercises judgment in meeting the needs of individual students is high. This is particularly the case with teaching staff. A problem arising from this is the possibility that quality can be affected due to variability of service delivery (Nicholls, 1987).
4. **The nature of demand relative to supply:** A service can involve a wide spread demand (e.g. electricity) or a narrow one (e.g. insurance). At the same time the ability of services to be increased quickly to meet fluctuations in demand can vary. While electricity services can be increased fairly quickly to meet peak demands, if the capacity is available, hotel accommodation is more difficult to regulate. In education the demand is subject to relatively narrow fluctuations over time, yet supply is sometimes difficult to manage, with limitations placed on availability of staff and places in courses.

- 5. The method of service delivery:** Delivery of services may also be classified into those requiring either single or multiple site outlets, and the nature of the customer interaction with the service. Customers may either move to the service provider, or the service provider can move to meet them. Delivery of international education services traditionally involve the student coming to the institution to complete their courses. However this is changing, with the establishment of offshore teaching programs and distance education (Soutar and Mazzarol, 1995). Modern technologies have also enabled remote service delivery (Hamer, 1993).

These characteristics of education as a marketable service provide a background to the present marketing activities of various education institutions within the APEC region . With education institutions now generating millions of dollars every year from international student fees, many are turning increasingly to sophisticated marketing to achieve success. The APEC region is one of the most active areas for such operations. Asian countries contribute around 80 per cent of the international students currently studying abroad. Other APEC nations, namely Australia, Canada, Japan, the United States and New Zealand, are major host nations for many of these students.

Institutional and Student Perspective's on Critical Success Factors for marketing

For most education institutions seeking to attract and retain fee paying students, the prime objective is to identify success strategies that they can follow that will enable them to achieve a competitive advantage over their rivals. To address this issue, two separate surveys were undertaken that examined the perceptions of both the institutions and their students as to which factors were critical to the successful marketing of an education institution.

The first study was undertaken as part of a doctoral research program designed to examine the factors critical to the success of education institutions in international markets (Mazzarol, 1998). This study drew on a sample of 315 institutions in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and United Kingdom engaged in international education.

Designed to measure the relationship between marketing practice and competitive advantage in international education, the survey was targeted at international officers and marketing or recruitment managers within universities, schools and colleges in the five supplier countries. Just over half (52%) of respondents listed their function as administration and 34% as marketing. The majority (75%) had been involved with education for over 10 years and the average length of time in their positions was six years. Seventy five % of respondents said they were frequently involved in planning decisions relating to international marketing for their organizations. This suggests that the sample represents an experienced and relatively expert group.

Respondents were asked to consider the importance of a broad range of issues relating to their marketing and business strategies. The final survey instrument comprised 40 questions in eight sections. These questions encompassed a wide range of issues, including respondents'

perceptions of the international marketing environment, factors influencing marketing strategy development, the value of promotional strategies and decision making.

The second study was undertaken as part of an examination of potential links between education institutions in Canada and Australia in the area of education (Mazzarol, Soutar and Thien, 1996). A survey was distributed throughout a dozen Australian colleges and universities. Some questionnaires were mailed directly to students, while others were distributed by academic staff during classes. A final useable sample was collected from 879 students. Just over half the sample (53%) were international students, of whom 69 per cent were studying in Australia for the first time. Fifty-five per cent of the sample were female and the average age of the students was 24 years. Ages ranged from 16 years to 64 years. The majority of the students (88%) were enrolled within their institutions on a full-time basis. Eighty-one per cent of the students were enrolled in undergraduate programs, 15 per cent in post-graduate programs and remainder in ELICOS, post-secondary diploma courses or other programs. The proportion of students enrolled in various subject areas (e.g. business, engineering, science etc) across the sample was found to be largely representative of the international student population.

Both surveys examined respondents' perceptions of the factors critical to a student's selection of an educational institution. A series of twenty-one critical success factors were included in the institutional study. These factors were identified from a comprehensive review of the literature and by reference to an expert panel drawn from tertiary institutions in Western Australia. A full pilot study was undertaken prior to the field trial (Mazzarol, 1994).

Table 1
Rotated Factor Matrix - Critical Success Factors (Institutional View)

Variables	Factor 1 Marketing Activity	Factor 2 Technology & People	Factor 3 Campu s & Courses	Factor 4 Student body	Factor 5 Market Image
Use of private recruitment agents	0.83				
Use of overseas student offices (e.g. AECs)	0.83				
Overseas advertising and promotion	0.81				
To have offshore recruitment offices	0.79				
To have offshore teaching programs	0.65				
To be a pioneer or early entrant to foreign market	0.62				
Possession of large market share	0.56				
To have international strategic alliances	0.5				
Effective use of information technology		0.81			
Encouragement of innovation		0.77			
The development of a customer oriented culture		0.68			
Possession of strong financial resources		0.66			
Quality & experience of staff		0.65			
Size of campus			0.82		
Location of campus			0.77		
Ability to offer a broad range of courses			0.61		

Technical superiority			0.49		
To have a large student population				0.73	
Possession of a strong alumni base				0.61	
A reputation for quality					0.81
To be well known and recognized					0.77
Eigenvalue	7.31	2.67	1.41	1.14	1.05
Percent of variance explained	34.8	12.7	6.7	5.4	5
Cumulative percentage	34.8	47.5	54.3	59.7	64.8
Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients	0.89	0.82	0.77	0.55	0.55

A factor analysis of the twenty-one items in the institutional study identified five underlying dimensions that explained sixty-five per cent of variance. The measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) for the variables was 0.88, indicating their suitability for factor analysis. Five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were found. The details of this analysis are shown in Table 1. It can be seen that the five factors were:

- **Marketing Activity** - a measure of the institution's perceptions of the importance of private agents, advertising, offshore recruitment offices, the size of international student enrolments, and possession of international strategic alliances.
- **Technology & People** - a measure of the institution's perceptions of its use of information technology, the strength of financial resources and the recruitment/retention of quality/experienced staff.
- **Campus & Courses** - a measure of such issues as the institution's size, geographic location, range of courses and programs and technical superiority.
- **Student Body** - a measure of the size of the student population enrolled at the institution and the strength/activity of the Alumni.
- **Market Image** - a measure of the institution's overall reputation for quality and level of recognition within the market.

This list of variables was used again in the student survey with some minor changes. Two items ('possession of a large market share' and 'being a pioneer or early entrant into a market') were removed for this second survey as they were considered difficult for student respondents to answer. These items were replaced with three new ones relating to 'recognition of the student's past qualifications', 'recognition of the institution's qualifications by potential employers' and 'flexibility of entry'. The potential importance of these three items was identified in a series of focus groups undertaken with students conducted throughout Australia at the twelve participating institutions from which the student sample was drawn.

A further factor analysis of these twenty-two items was undertaken. The MSA for these items was 0.91, suggesting suitability for further analysis. Four factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than 1 which explained sixty-four per cent of variance. Table 2 shows the

results of this analysis. As shown in Table 2, the four dimensions identified within the student survey related to:

- **Resources & Courses** - a measure of the institutions use of technology, quality of facilities, quality/expertise of staff, range of programs offered, size of alumni, overall reputation and recognition, and responsiveness to student needs.
- **Offshore marketing** - important primarily to international students, this measured the institution's use of overseas agents, information offices such as the Australian Education Centres (AECs), its own offshore offices and teaching programs, as well as its geographic proximity to the students home country.
- **Entry & Advertising** - a measure of the flexibility of entry into the institution, the importance of the size of its existing student population, and its level of advertising and promotion.
- **Future Employment** - this single item measured the level of perceived recognition given to the institution's qualifications by future potential employers.

Table 2
Rotated Factor Matrix - Critical Success Factors (Student View)

Variables	Factor 1 Resources & Courses	Factor 2 Offshore Marketing	Factor 3 Entry & Advertising	Factor 4 Credit transfer
Makes use of latest information technology	0.78			
Is noted for its superior use of technology	0.78			
Has reputation for quality/expert staff	0.77			
Has large campus/excellent facilities	0.76			
Well known for innovation in research/teaching	0.74			
Has reputation as responsive to student needs	0.74			
Institution has a reputation for quality	0.69			
Institution is financially stable	0.68			
Institution is well known (market awareness)	0.59			
Offers a broad range of courses/programs	0.58			
Willing to recognize my past qualifications	0.55			
Has a strong and active alumni	0.53			
Has alliances with institutions known to me	0.48			
Possession of overseas recruitment office		0.94		
Use of recruitment agents overseas		0.93		
Possession of offshore teaching programs		0.93		

Listed with the AECs		0.93		
Location of campus geographically close		0.88		
Offers flexible entry throughout the year			0.58	
Has a large number of students enrolled			0.49	
Advertises or promotes itself strongly			0.46	
Qualifications recognized by employers				0.65
Eigenvalue	6.81	4.61	1.67	1.09
Percent of variance explained	30.9	20.9	7.6	5
Cumulative percentage	30.9	51.9	59.5	64.4
Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients	0.9	0.96	0.62	

An examination of the reliability coefficients, shown in Tables 1 and 2, suggests that the reliability of the factors varied, with alpha scores from 0.55 to 0.89. This suggests that the factors are a useful measure of the underlying dimensions they reflect.

Although some variations in the variables comprising these factors was noticeable between the two surveys, many similarities were found. The Market Image factor from the institutional sample was similar to the Resources & Courses factor from the student sample. Both relate to an institution's market profile and reputation for quality. The latter factor, however, also combines many of the features of the institutional Campus & Courses and Technology & People factors.

Table 3
Critical Success Factors - Institutional and Student Views of relative importance

factors	t-test results	
	mean	importance rating
Institutional Sample (n = 315)		
<i>Market Image</i>	6.48	first
<i>Technology & People</i>	5.53	second
<i>Campus & Courses</i>	5.02	third
<i>Marketing Activity</i>	3.99	fourth
<i>Student Body</i>	3.93	fourth
Student Sample (n = 828)		
<i>Future employment</i>	5.39	first
<i>Resources & Courses</i>	5.02	second
<i>Overseas Marketing</i>	4.62	third
<i>Entry & Advertising</i>	4.55	third

A comparison of the relative importance placed on these factors by the two groups was undertaken. Each factor variable was examined in terms of its mean score, as measured on a seven point Likert rating scales used (where 1 = of little or no importance in attracting students, to 7 = of extreme importance in attracting students). The differences between the mean rating scores for each factor was measured using a t-test procedure. Table 3 shows the relative importance of these factors to the two groups.

It can be seen that the institutional sample rated Market Image as being of greatest importance to the competitive advantage of an education institution, followed by Technology & People and Campus & Courses. Not surprisingly, the student sample rated Future employment as most important.

However, the differences between the institutional and student views of these selection criteria was not great. As noted earlier, the student sample Resources & Courses factor combines many of the elements of the institutional Market Image, Technology & People and Campus & Courses factors. While the institutions appear to have separated these items into the three distinct factors, the students treat all these elements as a part of the same dimension.

A Comparison of Australian and Overseas Students

In addition to comparing the differences in views of the education institutions and their international student clients, a further comparison was made of the differences between Australian and overseas students.

Students had been asked to rate the importance of seventeen variables to their decision to select a particular institution for study. A seven point rating scale was used for all items (where 1 = of little or no importance and 7 = of extreme importance to the decision). The differences between the international and Australian domestic students in the sample were examined using a discriminant analysis procedure. The discriminant analysis correctly classified 71 per cent of the students. The classification results from the analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Classification Results – Prediction of Group Membership

	Cases	Group 1 FFPOS	Group 2 Australian HECS
Group 1 FFPOS	445	330 (74.2%)	115 (25.8%)
Group 2 Australian HECS	392	132 (33.7%)	260 (66.3%)
Percent correctly classified:	70.5%		

The findings of the discriminant analysis are shown in Table 5. It can be seen that the most important issues for both international and Australian domestic students when selecting an institution were whether their qualifications on graduation would be recognized. This was rated equally as important overall as the reputation for quality of the host institution. Most other issues were rated as high in importance, with mean scores above 4.

What is worth noting in Table 5 are the differences between the international students and the Australian students with respect to the various influencing factors. The factors that were found to be significantly positive for international students were the quality and reputation of the institution, the recognition of the institution's qualifications, the strategic alliances the

institutions have, the quality of the institution's staff, its alumni base and the existing student population.

While not significant from the multivariate analysis, a bi-variate analysis (using *t*-tests) found that international students were also found to be significantly more influenced by the quality of campus facilities, how customer focused an institution was, how innovative and financially stable it seemed to be and how flexible its entrance requirements were.

Table 5
Findings of the Student Survey on Factors Influencing Choice of Institution

Note: + indicates positively classifies FFPOS, - indicates negatively classifies FFPOS to a 95% confidence level as measured by the discriminant analysis. NS indicates not significant at the 95% confidence level. * indicates significant difference between FFPOS & Aust means.

Factor influencing choice	Overall mean	FFPOS mean	Aust mean	Discriminant significance
The institution had a reputation for quality	5.58	5.66	5.50	+
The institution was well known to me	5.06	4.96	5.18*	-
The institution has links with other institutions that I am familiar with	4.10	4.42	3.72*	+
The institution has a large campus and excellent facilities	5.00	5.10	4.89*	NS
The institution has a reputation for the quality and expertise of its staff	5.30	5.48	5.10*	+
The institution has a reputation for being responsive to student needs	5.07	5.33	4.77*	NS
The institution is well known for its innovation in research and teaching	5.07	5.19	4.93*	NS
The institution makes use of the latest information technology	5.32	5.40	5.23	NS
I feel that this institution was financially stable	4.71	4.96	4.44*	NS
The institution offers a broad range of courses and programs	5.16	5.45	5.46	NS
The institution is noted for its superior use of technology	5.02	5.10	4.93	-
The institution has a strong Alumni through which I learnt	3.50	4.03	2.89*	+

about it				
A large number of students are already enrolled at the institution	4.16	4.45	3.83*	+
When I graduate my qualifications will be recognized by future employers	6.09	6.10	6.07	NS
The institution advertises and promotes itself strongly	4.72	4.68	4.76	-
This institution offered flexible entry throughout the year	4.76	4.94	4.57*	NS
This institution was willing to recognize my previous qualifications and accept me	5.39	5.65	5.09*	+

Implications for management and future research

For the institutional sample, the most important factor was perceived to be market image and reputation. While this is likely to be a critical issue to the achievement of market success, it is a difficult attribute to measure.

This research highlights the importance of prospective students having their qualifications recognized by employers upon graduation. While not a surprising finding, it emphasizes the need for institutions to provide evidence of the recognition of their qualifications among employers when conducting marketing activities. Such evidence can be demonstrated through testimonials from successful graduates or endorsements of the program by professional associations or industry accreditation.

These findings also suggest that some significant differences may exist between international fee paying students and their Australian HECS paying counterparts over institutional selection issues. While both groups of student may feel that having their qualifications recognized by future employers after graduation is very important, the international students were more likely to be positively influenced by:

- The institution's reputation for quality;
- The institution's links or alliances with other institutions familiar to the student;
- The institution's reputation for having high quality staff;
- The Alumni base and its word of mouth referral process;
- The number of students already enrolled at the institution; and
- Whether the institution is willing to recognize the students past qualifications.

These are important issues an education institution needs to considered when developing an international marketing strategy and they are consistent with the findings of a study of 315

education institutions in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and Britain undertaken in 1994 (Mazzarol, 1997).

For an institution seeking to gain a positive market image, its ability to demonstrate that its qualifications are well recognized is important. Further enhancement of the institution's market image is likely to flow from the institution being able to demonstrate a positive track record in its resources and courses.

These findings also point to the relative importance of marketing activities that focus on the use of agents, government information offices, such as the AECs, the presence of offshore teaching programs and strong international strategic alliances.

These findings should also be considered in conjunction with earlier research that examined the factors influencing student choice of a country destination. This research found significant associations with a student's prior knowledge and awareness of the country, its geographic proximity to their own country, the host country's 'environment' (e.g. crime rates, climate, cost of living) and whether other students or family members have chosen that country (Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery, 1997). It appears that international students frequently select a country first and then an institution within that country. Educational institutions marketing internationally need to be aware of this and supportive of national marketing as, otherwise, they may never obtain entry into international students' choice sets.

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