Internet Marketing Plan for Educa

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Executive Summary

Educa is an on-line software that bridges the gap between the classroom and the home for kindergarteners and their parents and teachers. Educa has an excellent existing internet marketing plan, but could benefit from greater brand awareness. Through the use of e-mail campaigns, affiliations, and sponsorships, Educa could improve their internet marketing and brand awareness. Educa faces a small cost of roughly $2,960 in implementing these marketing tools, and stands to gain a substantial amount of brand awareness. Effectiveness will be easily measured by statistically comparing historical data on website hit counters and sales figures with post-improvements data, and the majority of the plan will be carried out within a month.

Company Description

Educa is a web-based software company that creates software to help facilitate the education of young children, primarily around the kindergarten age. Educa's software is a subscription based web-application that aims to bridge the gap between the home and the classroom. The software allows instructors at kindergartens and other early childhood education centres to digitally track a student's progress and learning experiences, share it with the parents, and get feedback from the parents. The company won the 2011 Bright Idea Challenge in the education category, and just recently announced a partnership with the Early Childhood Council[1].

Strategic Focus and Marketing Plan

Mission

Educa's offers an easy-to-use, intuitive software platform to connect teachers in the classroom with parents at home in order to share their young children's academic development.

Strategy and Objectives

Educa has created an interactive web-site that is informative and easy to use. The ease of use and elegancy of the site is imperative because it is indicative of the quality of the web-application.

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[1] Educa, 2012

Educa offers their services for sale from the site and offer a one month trial period to create leads and convert those leads into sales.

Educa's objectives are to increase the number of subscribers to their service, to retain subscribers by offering a high-value product, and to increase awareness of their product.

Current Internet Marketing Plan

Educa's current internet marketing plan is fairly comprehensive and has obviously had a lot of effort put into it. Their business is internet-based and their product virtual, so it would have been imperative to create an extensive marketing plan from the establishment. Educa has an intuitive and well-constructed web-site that allows users to gather information, purchase a subscription, and begin the set-up process; the usability of the site could be rated as highly effective.

Querying a search engine such as Google reveals the site as ranked number one when searching "Educa" and as a top result when searching for "education e-profile" and like terms. Educa already has integrated with the social media site Facebook and links to their "fan page" from the site home page. Prices for subscriptions are listed on the site, and a free trial is offered to entice possible customers to sign up.

Improving the Internet Marketing Plan

Educa could benefit from greater brand awareness, as they need greater awareness to increase subscriptions. They could employ a direct e-mail marketing campaign targeted at teachers and administrators, display and increase the number of affiliates, and sponsor kindergartens and other child education centres. Additionally, they can offer an incentives for referring others to subscribe. Extending the free trial period may also help to convert leads into sales.

Currently, Educa's target markets are teachers and parents of kindergarten-aged children. While the users may be teachers and parents, the purchasers of the software are school and education institution administrators. Educa should focus more on the business to business aspect of how

their product is sold. When raising awareness, administrators should be considered the target market and should be focused on more than parents and faculty.

Situation Analysis

SWOT Analysis *Refer to Appendix 1*

Pioneering the market and securing a partnership with Early Childhood Council strengthen Educa's credibility. New entrants to the industry are a threat.

Industry and Competitors *Refer to Appendix 2*

The industry of education e-profiles is currently small but growing. So far, this industry has succeeded entirely on-line through the use of web-applications and seems as it will continue this way. There are no direct competitors to Educa at this time, and it is important to note that the industry is moving towards mobile applications.

Customer Analysis *Refer to Appendix 3*

The target market consists of teachers and parents of kindergarten-aged children. Traditionally, neither of these markets interact heavily with the internet outside of work. This work-place familiarity will open a door for Educa introduce the use of a web-application.

Market-Product Focus

Objectives

Increase Number of Subscribers

The suggested internet marketing plan will increase the number of subscribers to by converting more leads to sales and increasing awareness of the brand. Lengthening the trial period to a full school semester (four months) will allow enough time for the application to become integrated into the school's curriculum and the parent's life. Once integrated, administrators will find it easier to justify purchasing the subscription and harder to abandon the service. Increased awareness will insure that more people are exposed to the company and its ideas, and should result in increased demand.

Retain Subscribers

Educa's current internet marketing plan satisfies this objective with an intuitive web-site and easy to reach customer service, and the suggested plan will not affect this.

Increase Awareness

One of the main goals of the suggested marketing plan is to increase awareness. Awareness will be increased through a direct e-mail marketing scheme targeted towards school administrators and teachers in the target market. Sponsorships of kindergarten and other education centres will also increase awareness of Educa as a brand. Lastly, offering an incentive for referring new customers will entice current customers to spread the word about Educa.

Target Markets

The current internet marketing plan focuses parents and teachers of kindergarteners as the target markets. However, the suggested improvements aim to slightly shift the target market towards the administrators that will be purchasing Educa's software. The current focus is on the users, but I wish to garner awareness of Educa among administrators and employ a more B2B focused marketing plan.

Differentiation

The proposed marketing plan does not aim to change anything I the product itself. Educa's software is already differentiated, as it is the only product offering what it does. Furthermore, the marketing plan does not include advertising due to the small niche purchasing base, so there is no real need to focus on standing apart in brad image.

Positioning

The main focus of the suggested internet marketing plan is to increase awareness and accrue better positioning for Educa as a learning tool. Since there are no other companies offering direct competition, there is no company to try and surpass in position.

However, Blackboard is a web-application software that has similar goals of integration in education (albeit to a different target market). Educa's goal for positioning should be to reach the level of Blackboard, where it is assumed by teachers, students, and parents that the application will be used. Additionally, Educa needs to ensure that their position at the top is protected from any possible new entrant threats. Once a school has been fully integrated with Educa, it would be hard for them to switch to a different service. By raising awareness, acquiring more subscribers, and subsequently enlarging their customer base, Educa can raise the barriers to entry for other companies.

Marketing Programme

Product Strategy

Educa's software emerged onto the market as a web-application, so the internet marketing plan will not change the product with regards to its use on the internet. The nature of the product ensures that it is already adapted to the on-line world.

Price Strategy

Educa uses a competitive price strategy rather than a cost-based one. Once a web-application is built, there is little cost to maintain it, even as accounts are users are added. The low variable cost of adding accounts means that it is not priced on a per-cost basis. The suggested internet marketing plan does not change the price strategy, with the exception of creating a longer trial. The longer trial period may garnish less immediate income in the short term, but does not affect the price strategy long term.

Promotion Strategy

With the suggested plan, there will be increased promotion on-line in the form of e-mail campaigns and affiliates, and off-line in the form of sponsorships. The whole world is not lived on-line, and Educa needs to bring people to the site for them to become involved with the internet marketing plan.

The promotion strategy will be to make people aware of the product and web-site. The site show's Educa's value, and if affiliate sites link people to the Educa site, the original internet marketing plan can do the rest of the convincing. Additionally, e-mail campaigns will be the largest push for promotion, and will actively encourage recipients to visit and begin a trial.

Place (Distribution) Strategy

The distribution hardly changes with the suggested internet marketing plan. Distribution was already exclusively on the net, so it will not deepen it. However, we hope to widen distribution of service to more (if not all) kindergartens in NZ.

Financial Projections

Budgeting

An American company, Americaint, lists an online quote for the e-mail campaign of $99 USD for gathering e-mail addresses and e-mailing 100,000 people (more than enough[2]), plus another $250 to e-mail a targeted market such as ours. The total cost for an emailing campaign would be $460 NZD ($350 USD)[3].

Set aside $2,500 to be allocated for sponsorship money. Plan on spending around $100 at each school or institution.

Affiliations should not cost any money. It is mutually beneficial, so there should be no "advertising" cost. The affiliating company would simply have to add a link on their page at a negligible cost. A list of affiliations on the Educa site could easily be added by the web developer also at a negligible cost.

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[2] Based on figures from New Zealand Kindergartens Inc

[3] Americaint Emarketing Solutions

The total cost to the suggested internet marketing plan will be $2,960 NZD. Disregarding the low variable cost of the web-application, Educa would only need to gain three or four accounts for a year to reap this cost.

Recommendations and Conclusions

I. Begin direct e-mail marketing campaign to kindergarten and childhood education centre administrators and teachers. Use an outside company for this.

    A. Expect an increase of 50%-60% in hits to the website and media.

    B. Expect a 5% increase in trials and subscriptions.

II. Extend trial period to a full 4 months (1 school semester) and offer a !0% discount for a year for referring a paying subscriber.

    A. Expect to see a an increase of 50% in converting trial members to sales.

    B. Expect to see a 10% increase in memberships coming from referrals.

III. Begin officially affiliating Educa with schools and centres that already use the application and other supportive child education groups on-line by linking to each other's website (this should not cost any money). Sponsor 25 schools in different cities with up to $100.

    A. Expect to see a 5% increase in subscriptions from sponsored centres.

    B. Expect an increase of 50% in traffic from affiliate links.

Implementation Plan

The marketing manager should begin the e-mail marketing campaign right away by drafting the email that will be sent out, being careful to make the e-mail attractive and not seem like spam. Marketing manager should coordinate with the company sending
the e-mails, and should have the e-mails sent out within three weeks.

The Trial period should immediately be extended to four months. Marketing manager should include this in e-mails, issue a press release, and post the news to Facebook network. Have web developer tweak website to reflect changes.

The marketing manager should also quickly get into contact with schools that are using Educa to propose affiliation. This should be quick and easy since the company should already be in regular contact with customer schools. Have the web developer add a section to the web-site for affiliates at next scheduled maintenance (within the month if possible).

The marketing manager should determine which schools and areas to target for sponsorships and begin contacting them. This should be started in the next month, and should be ready to approach schools after their winter holiday.

Evaluation and Control

From these three recommendations, expect to see about a 20% (5% e-mail campaign, 10% referrals, 5% affiliations) increase in subscriptions. An average of 1.7% increase should be seen each month over the year. Also expect to see a 100% (50% e-mail campaign, 50% affiliations) increase web-site views over the year, easily measured with a hit counter, most likely skewed towards the beginning of the implementation. Lastly, a there should be 50% more conversions to paid subscriptions from the free trial period after the four month extension. Increases in subscriptions can be measured with sales figures, and can be compared statistically to previous sales records to evaluate their effectiveness.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis

- **Strengths**
  - It is currently endorsed by New Zealand Early Childhood Council. Being associated with such a credible sponsor has helped Educa gain trust and attain a stronger customer base.
  - Educa's main competitive advantage is that it is a market pioneer. Being the pioneer of the industry, it stands for innovativeness and entrepreneurship. This not only guarantees a set of loyal customers but also provides a competitive edge over other software companies that will follow.
- **Weakness**
  - Since it is a relatively newly developed software program, it has not received any constructive feedback that can be used to gauge its weakness. Using foresight, the weaknesses that could be predicted are lack of features, technical glitches and low usage rate.
- **Opportunities**
  - Educa could expand to become primary education providers. Becoming leading market players in providing this software to kindergartens, primary schools and higher schooling would create a dynamic market presence.
  - Once the software has gained a significant number of customers, Educa could use their network of contacts to establish goodwill and a long-term reputation in the education sector. An objective like this could be achieved by conducting informative seminars that improve a parent's involvement in their child's education experience.
- **Threats**
  - New entrants to the market place and followers could steal Educa's current clientele. Market players who provide better features and improved software systems could significantly hinder Educa's reach.
  - Expanding into the Australian market would be the most significant threat because there are already well positioned similar companies in that market. It would cost Educa a lot of time, energy and resources for very little market share.

Appendix 2: Industry Analysis

Political/ legal

As Educa is looking into expanding its network over to Australia they will have to look at
the any legal proceedings that may block them from expanding.

Economy

The economy in New Zealand has been declining for a few years, so by using this programme the teachers of the children in the Education centres are saving money and time. For 30 children it will cost approx $1050 to create a portfolio using scrap books and binders but Educa cost $588 saving you 462 and for 100 children it will save you $2312.

Social

Parents of young child always want to be a part of their lives but as the duty of full time work and life style situations force parents to place their children in day cares and kindergartens they feel as though they are missing

out. Educa allows these parents to feel as if they are sharing those moments with their children and putting their minds at ease about the state of them. As it allows parents t become 'more engaged and connected with their children's learning' (Educa, 2012). This parental involvement will lead to better quality education for the children as the teachers gain more and more feedback from the parents.

Technology

Technology is an important part of Educa. As the programme is based on using the Internet Educa would need to create apps for the programme to work not only on computers but on phones, tablets, and ipads as this is the type of receiver that the users of the programme would have. Technology can also be used by Educa to promote its service through social media because the use of social media is growing and people upload videos and photos to show the latest activities that are happening in their lives.

Appendix 3 : Customer Analysis

Target market: The company product has the function of connecting teachers and parents; therefore, its market should content 2 components: kindergarten teachers & toddler's parents.

Kindergarten teachers: they are the teachers of kindergarten centres that specialized in teaching and taking care of toddlers. They are trained; therefore they have specialized knowledge that parents do not usually have. However, their jobs only limit to the office hours and cannot cover the role of the parents. Therefore, they have the need to transform their knowledge and observation about the toddlers to the parent. They want the communication to be fast, easy and convenient since their main job is to taking care of the children.

Toddler's parents: They are parents with busy time schedule that could not take care of the children themselves; so they send them to the kindergarten. However, they also have the need and responsibility to take care of their children. Due to the lack of time, they do not have full view of how their children grow up. Therefore, parents want to check on their children as much as possible. As a result, the communication needs to be convenient, easy to understand and updated.

References

1) Educa. 11www.educa.co.nz, accessed June 2012.
2) New Zealand Kindergartens Inc. http://www.nzkindergarten.org.nz/about.html, accesed June 2012.
3) Americaint Marketing Solutions. http://www.americaint.com/email-marketing-campaigns/email-marketing-services.html#targetedemailmarketingcampaigns, accesed June 2012.

Word Count (Not including appendices)

2,198