

Educational marketing for high schools**Mercadotecnia educativa para escuelas de nivel medio superior**

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Abstract

Educational marketing is a key tool for institutional positioning and attracting new students in upper secondary schools. In addition, it allows the offering of quality services adapted to the educational needs of students and potential applicants. The objective of this study was to design an educational marketing plan for this educational level, using a mixed research approach. Systematic, empirical, and critical processes were applied, as well as quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The data collection instruments were addressed to the target population, that is, third-grade students from seven secondary schools in the city of Tulancingo, Hidalgo, and their parents. Based on the results obtained, positioning, loyalty, and attention strategies were proposed for the applicants and the students of the campus where the research was carried out. These strategies can be used by other educational institutions of the same level.

Resumen

El marketing educativo es una herramienta clave para el posicionamiento institucional y la captación de alumnos de nuevo ingreso en las escuelas de nivel medio superior. Además, permite ofrecer servicios de calidad adaptados a las necesidades educativas de los estudiantes y los potenciales aspirantes. El objetivo de este estudio fue diseñar un plan de marketing educativo para este nivel educativo, utilizando un enfoque mixto de investigación. Se aplicaron procesos sistemáticos, empíricos y críticos, así como el análisis de datos cuantitativos y cualitativos. Los instrumentos de recolección de datos se dirigieron a la población objetivo, es decir, alumnos de tercer grado de siete escuelas secundarias de la ciudad de Tulancingo, Hidalgo, y sus padres de familia. A partir de los resultados obtenidos, se plantearon estrategias de posicionamiento, fidelización y atención para los aspirantes y los estudiantes del plantel donde se realizó la investigación. Estas estrategias pueden ser utilizadas por otras instituciones educativas del mismo nivel.

Education, Marketing, Strategy**Educación, Estrategias, Mercadotecnia**

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Introduction

Low school enrollment is a problem that affects many higher education institutions, which has repercussions on their viability and quality. One of the causes of this problem is the lack of advertising strategies to position the institution in the educational market and attract potential applicants. Educational marketing is the set of activities that seek to collect, analyze and distribute information on educational supply and demand, in order to adapt services and improve the institutional image.

The objective of this study was to design an educational marketing plan for CBTIS 179 located in Tulancingo, Hidalgo, which has had a low school enrollment for 3 years as shown in Table 1.

School year	Registered students
2018-2019	235
2019-2020	210
2020-2021	190
2021-2022	153

Table 1 Students enrolled in the school cycles
Source: Own elaboration

Ramírez et al. (2014) define school dropout as "the action of abandoning school; this problem occurs at all educational levels and is caused by various intrinsic and extrinsic factors" (p.52).

For Espíndola & León (2002), school dropout is the result of a process in which extra-school and intra-school factors intervene.

To this end, a mixed research approach was used, combining systematic, empirical and critical processes, as well as quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The data collection instruments were applied to 174 third grade students from seven secondary schools in the city and to 10 parents. Based on the results obtained, positioning, loyalty and attention strategies were proposed for the applicants and students of the campus. These strategies can be used by other educational institutions at the same level.

According to Mendoza (2020), educational marketing will allow the institution to obtain greater enrollment of students and thus position itself in the educational market.

This document is structured in the following sections: methodological design, educational diagnosis, sample design, market research, educational marketing plan, results of implemented strategies and conclusions. The added value of this research is that it provides a guideline for educational institutions to consider the design of educational marketing as a tool to achieve their objectives in the short and medium term due to positioning in the educational field at local, state, national and international levels.

Methodological design

In the present study the mixed type of research was applied, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods, to analyze the variables that will be useful for the institution's marketing plan. Data were collected from the sample by means of questionnaires and interviews, and the perception that the target public has of the educational service offered through its advertising was analyzed. Thus, we sought to obtain valid and reliable information for the educational diagnosis and the design of marketing strategies.

The methodological design to carry out the marketing plan was based on the model proposed by Arcos & Corrales (2012), which considers five stages:

Situational diagnosis: consists of analyzing the internal and external environment of the institution, identifying its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

Market research: consists of gathering information on the target market, competition, product, price, distribution and promotion, using quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Strategic direction: this consists of defining the institution's mission, vision, values, objectives and marketing strategies, taking into account the situational diagnosis and market research.

Action plan: consists of establishing the concrete actions to be taken to implement the marketing strategies, assigning responsibilities, resources, deadlines and budgets.

Plan control: consists of evaluating the fulfillment of the marketing plan's objectives and actions, using performance indicators and control tools.

The instruments used to carry out the research were two techniques: a survey that made it possible to collect quantitative data on the willingness of individuals to acquire the educational service and meet their needs upon graduation, and an interview that facilitated obtaining qualitative data through direct interaction with parents, in order to identify their wishes regarding the key points that institutions of higher secondary education should have in order to enroll their children once they graduate from high school.

Educational diagnosis

Knowing the situation surrounding the educational institution was essential to determine the actions to be taken. For this purpose, the SWOT analysis method was used, which consists of identifying the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of the institution, as well as the problems derived from it.

The results of the SWOT analysis revealed that CBTIS 179 has strengths such as low costs, teachers' experience, scholarships and agreements with universities; opportunities such as lack of promotion, publicity and positioning; weaknesses such as low economic income, location, no resources for publicity, poor corporate image and lack of efficiency in management; and threats such as competition from other institutions and insecurity.

Based on these results, several problems were detected that affect the performance and quality of the institution, such as lack of maintenance, school dropout, low enrollment and the low number of scholarships. These problems require strategic actions to strengthen strengths, take advantage of opportunities, overcome weaknesses and confront threats.

The educational diagnosis carried out allows us to know the current state of CBTIS 179 and its main challenges and potentialities. Thus, it contributes to its continuous improvement and its positioning in the educational market.

Selection of the sample

The population for the development of the study focused on seven schools in the city of Tulancingo.

The study population consisted of 1,348 students in the third year of high school in the 2022-2023 school year, from which a non-probabilistic sample of 174 students was selected by convenience, with an equal distribution by gender. The inclusion criterion was to be enrolled in the third year of secondary school and to have attended at least 80% of the classes. The exclusion criterion was to present some disability or special educational need that would hinder the application of the measurement instrument. The selection of the sample was carried out with the collaboration of the principals of each school, who facilitated access to the students who met the established requirements.

Market research

The following results were obtained from the questionnaires applied:

The sample consisted of 174 students, of whom 95 (54.6%) were female and 79 (45.4%) were male. The socioeconomic level of the respondents was mostly low, with 68% receiving between 50 and 70 pesos a week from their parents for their expenses. The average age of the students was 14.7 years, with a standard deviation of 0.8 years. Forty-two percent were 14 years old, 40% were 15 years old, 8% were 16 years old, and only 1.7% were older. The majority of the students (92%) expressed their interest in continuing with their high school education, arguing reasons such as improving their quality of life, obtaining a professional career, having a stable job and having a taste for learning. On the other hand, 49% indicated that they would stop studying if they faced economic problems, while 21% did not answer this question and only 6% stated that they would not stop studying for any reason.

One of the aspects that the survey inquired about was the means by which the respondents learned about the institution. The results showed that 50% of the respondents learned about the institution through its proximity to the high school they were attending, 26% through the recommendation of a family member or friend, and 17% through social networks. The remaining 7% did not answer this question.

Another variable explored in the survey was the students' preference for the type of media used to access information about the educational offerings. The results revealed that 38% of the students considered social networks to be the best medium for information, while 25% opted to consult a web page and 37% expressed interest in receiving printed advertising.

Educational marketing plan

Based on the market research conducted, it is proposed to implement a series of educational marketing strategies to attract and retain students and parents of a high school institution. These strategies are based on offering added value, generating trust and loyalty, and creating a positive and differentiated image of the institution.

One of the strategies consists of providing free workshops on topics of interest to parents and students in the third grade of high school. These workshops are aimed at orienting potential clients about the educational options available, the benefits of studying at the institution, and the skills necessary for academic and professional success. According to several studies, these types of activities contribute to improving customer perception and satisfaction regarding the quality of the educational service (Sanz Del Vecchio, D. et al., 2017; Gordon Isasi, J. et al., 2020).

Another strategy is to create a basic English course for students currently in the third grade of high school. The purpose of this course is to provide a learning and linguistic development opportunity for students, as well as to encourage their interest in continuing their studies at the institution. The course would be given in classroom or online mode, depending on the students' preference, and would last for three months. At the end of the course, students would receive a certificate accrediting their level of English. English language proficiency is a key competence for academic and professional success in the globalized world (García Valero, M.C., 2018; Betancourt, R. R., & Zermeño, M. G. G., 2017).

On the other hand, it is proposed to plan contests and sweepstakes on social networks to generate interaction and dissemination. These contests and sweepstakes would consist of inviting users to follow the institution's official accounts, share its publications or tag their friends. The prizes would be partial or full scholarships, special discounts or promotional items. This strategy seeks to take advantage of the potential of social networks as communication and educational marketing tools (Chen, T., 2022).

In addition, it is proposed to develop special offers to capture the attention of new customers. These offers would include discounts for early payment, scholarships for academic or athletic merit, payment facilities or financing. These offers would be communicated through various means, such as brochures, posters, emails or WhatsApp messages. The objective is to offer competitive advantages and reduce economic barriers that may prevent customers from accessing or remaining at the institution (Gómez-Bayona, L. et al., 2020; Arciniega, Z., & Antonio, J., 2018.).

Likewise, it is suggested to organize cultural, sports and social events that promote coexistence and a sense of belonging. These events would be aimed at both current and potential customers, and would be held at the institution's facilities or in public spaces. Some examples of these events are festivals, concerts, exhibitions, tournaments, races, etc. These events are intended to create a positive and differentiated image of the institution, as well as to encourage customer participation and engagement (Gómez Ramírez, C., 2007; Torres et al., 2020).

Another strategy is to plan an event called "Open Days", which consists of opening the doors of the institution to the general public, where potential applicants and parents can learn about the facilities, the teaching-learning process and visualize and participate in some classes, activities and/or workshops. The purpose is to capture the interest of potential applicants and show them the advantages and opportunities offered by the institution. This strategy is based on the principle that direct experience is more effective than indirect information in influencing the decision of customers (Feito Alonso, R. et al., 2021).

It is also proposed to implement WhatsApp business as a direct and personalized communication channel with customers. This tool would allow instant messages, images, videos or audios to be sent to customers, as well as answering their queries, doubts or suggestions. The purpose is to establish a close and trusting relationship with customers, as well as to keep them informed about the institution's news and activities. WhatsApp business is a tool widely used and valued by customers, especially by young people (Sixto et al., 2021; Rodríguez Marin C., 2019).

In addition, it is proposed to create a specific area for the attention to students, where guidance, counseling and academic monitoring would be provided. This area would be made up of a multidisciplinary team of professionals, such as psychologists, pedagogues, tutors, etc. The objective is to offer a comprehensive and personalized service to students, addressing their academic, emotional and social needs. This strategy seeks to improve students' performance, motivation and satisfaction, as well as to prevent dropout or dropout (Cadena et al., 2018; Espinoza, Z. D. C et al., 2013).

Finally, it is suggested to produce testimonial videos of graduating students sharing their experiences and achievements. These videos would be disseminated through social networks, the website or the media. The objective is to show success stories that inspire and motivate potential clients to choose the institution as their educational option. Testimonials are a form of persuasion based on credibility and identification with the issuer (Escudero Artola, M. L., 2021; Monterrubio Cabrera, E., & Gordillo Benavente, L. de J. 2023). To carry out these strategies, an annual budget of \$218,000 pesos was developed. Table 2 shows the budget breakdown for each strategy.

Strategy	Cost
Free workshops	\$40,000
Basic English course	\$6,900
Contests and sweepstakes	\$9,000
Special offers	\$15,000
Cultural, sporting and social events	\$130,000
Open days	\$5,000
WhatsApp business	\$3,000
Student service area	\$4,100
Testimonial videos	\$5,000
Total	\$218,000

Table 2 Budget for educational marketing plan

Source: Own elaboration

Of this amount, it is estimated that \$130,000 pesos will be recovered from the income generated by the events that have a cost. Therefore,

Results of the educational marketing plan

An essential part of the educational marketing in this study has been to attract and retain customers in the educational sector, therefore, a call for fathers' day was made. This strategy was designed to generate interest and participation among current students and potential high school graduates. The call was disseminated through the institution's Facebook page, obtaining a total of 332 reactions from the public.

Another strategy consisted of producing institutional videos showing the institution's facilities, programs, services and activities. For this purpose, three people were contacted and produced different videos with the aim of reaching the target audience. The videos were posted on social networks, totaling 50 photos and a drone video.

In addition, different publications were made on the Facebook page about the activities carried out by the institution. Among them, the following stand out:

- Promotional visits to high schools, where the educational offerings and the benefits of studying at the institution were made known.
- Informative talks on reproductive health, as well as the delivery of contraceptive methods as a way of promoting public health.
- Activities carried out during different subjects, such as projects, experiments or exhibitions.
- The visits made by different universities, in order to disseminate their educational offerings and facilitate access and continuity of graduates.

The purpose of these publications was to show the academic, social and cultural work carried out in the institution, as well as to generate interaction and dissemination among users.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has achieved the objectives set out in the research, thus providing a concrete follow-up of the purposes of the project. Regarding the first objective of identifying the causes of the low level of interest of parents and potential applicants to enter the first semester and therefore the low enrollment in CBTIS 179, the problem identified was that parents and high school students are unaware of the existence and location of the institution. This is due to the lack of promotional dissemination of the educational center, and it was also identified that most parents prefer public schools. A relevant fact is that parents showed interest in the costs and educational offerings, arguing that they would have liked to know the offerings in advance, in order to consider enrolling their child.

It was also identified that high schools are potential customers, this is due to the proximity of the potential applicant's home to the school. It was observed that parents and children seek some type of scholarship to facilitate and continue their studies.

In accordance with the objective of designing an educational marketing plan in accordance with social needs and demands, based on a situational analysis of the campus, a SWOT analysis and determining the target public, strategies were designed to increase the number of new applicants and enrolled students. The proposed strategies are based on the objective of disseminating the educational offerings to attract the attention of parents and students in third grade of high school, achieving the positioning of the campus in the educational market.

It should be noted that the strategies that were implemented gradually during the course of this work, to date have obtained good results, achieving that the target market (new applicants) requested more detailed information about the educational offer and increased the number of new students in the period of September 2022.

Finally, to fulfill the objective of evaluating the marketing plan in order to modify or eliminate strategies according to the results, four instruments were designed. The first one will allow us to know the characteristics that a strategy should have.

The second will record the number of leads and students enrolled. The third will show the number of students enrolled and re-enrolled in each semester. Finally, a record of the reason for dropping out of school to design strategies to reduce the number of dropouts.

This work integrated the instruments to evaluate each strategy of the marketing plan in order to modify or eliminate strategies according to the results obtained. Now that the company knows its target public and its needs, it will be able to implement the suggested strategies.

The research conducted in this work provides a guideline for educational institutions to consider the design of educational marketing to achieve their short and medium term objectives, as well as positioning in the educational field at local, state and national levels.

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