

# The three vital elements within all marketing to teachers

**The three key components of marketing to schools, why many companies miss out on at least one of the three prime areas, and how these omissions can be quickly resolved.**

Marketing to schools consists of three essential areas of work, and to make the most of any advertising that one does, it is vital to consider all three.

And yet the monthly analysis of marketing to schools undertaken by Hamilton House for over 20 years has repeatedly shown that the overwhelming majority of companies that seek to sell into schools ignore one, if not two, of these three prime activities.

This is not to suggest a lack of ability or understanding on the part of those who do advertise to schools and teachers. Rather it highlights the fact that it is incredibly easy to miss out on all three aspects of marketing when one is very close to a product or service. It is also a fact that companies are encouraged to ignore many of the key issues in selling into schools by list retailers who seek to focus full attention on their mailing lists rather than anything else.

**These three elements within the process of marketing to teachers are sometimes known as the Three P's...**

- Positioning
- Promoting
- Performing

They are described below in detail.

**1: POSITIONING (Making the product one that everyone wants and everyone feels they need.)**

Imagine you have a product which offers a huge benefit to schools. For the sake of this example we'll say that the product is a computer program that holds all the school's policies. It ensures that all teachers have access to the very latest edition of each school policy and it records when individual members of staff have accessed a policy, so it is possible to prove to inspectors that teachers have read the agreed school procedures. It also enables policies to be inter-related, with automatic links between one policy and another, and it can even be used to ensure that parents "sign up" to the school rules and will support the school over matters within the rules.

As such, the system has real benefits. But it has one disadvantage – the school has to populate the program with the policies in the first place. If the school's policies are a muddle, and no one is willing to spend time sorting the issue out, the program doesn't really help the school.

Indeed the very schools that could benefit most from the program are the ones who can't use it, because they haven't got their policies sorted.

**The solution to this problem offers a perfect example of positioning.** If the supplier provides purchasing schools with a sample set of policies on all subjects, all schools can be using the system within minutes. Producing these policies would cost little and pre-loading the system would cost nothing, but the value to the disorganised school could be enormous. The sample policies are not part of the product as originally perceived, but offering them free with the program can suddenly make the system a complete solution to a school. The “position” of the product therefore changes.

Here’s one other example.

Let’s imagine that you offer a product that is unique. That’s obviously good - but if potential customers believe that a competitor has a similar product then any advertising focussing on your uniqueness will be liable to fail. What you need to do is to ensure that your uniqueness is instantly apparent and is based around something that teachers clearly want.

It is possible to resolve this issue by undertaking some research with teachers to find out their attitude to the uniqueness of your product, and then to ensure that elements of its uniqueness are made instantly apparent.

Here’s one final example of positioning at work – the issue of “I can do that myself”. Many products fail because teachers look at them and think “I can do that myself”. Of course, generally they don’t because they don’t have the time or the resources to do it. The trouble is that they might still think “I can do it myself”, and that stops the sale. What the marketing needs to do is to focus on something that the teacher could never do – even with all the time in the world.

Positioning as an activity looks at issues such as these and as a result modifies the marketing of the product to ensure that teachers and school managers see the product as right for them.

If you move directly into advertising without considering the issues raised by “positioning” your promotion is liable to fail, even if the product is desirable.

Overall, what we are looking at here are not just benefits, but instant benefits.

## **2: PROMOTING**

Promoting a product or service consists of two areas of activity, one concerning the medium and the other considering the message. It is not uncommon for a company with an excellent product to have difficulty in its marketing because it has been persuaded to focus entirely on the media (generally on a mailing list) rather than on all the issues of marketing.

**The media** that most people use to sell to schools are:

- Websites and blogs (with specific landing pages or micro sites for individual products)
- Email (normally focussing on emails that go straight to the teachers’ own email addresses, rather than to the schools’ general address)
- Direct mail (letters, brochures and catalogues sent to the school via solo mail and shared mail)

**The message** is affected by three factors:

- a) The medium that is selected from the list above.

- b) The level of understanding of the psychology of perception that is used within the advert.
- c) The way the text is developed in order to answer the two questions, “why buy this?” and “why buy this from me?”

The issue of the psychology of perception is too large a topic for this brief discussion – although if you want to get a feel for it there are references at the end to other articles. We will focus here instead on the text.

There are six different ways of advertising to teachers of which four are particularly common. (The two that are rarely used are humour and emotion).

These four most common methods of creating a message are:

- Announcing the product or service – which involves simply stating this is what we have and this is what it does.
- Promoting on price, suggesting that one has the lowest price, or that a discount is on offer at the moment.
- Focussing on the benefits of the products or service.
- Asking an interesting open question about an educational issue.

While it is understandable that few advertisements try to use humour or emotion as a central selling point, it is interesting that the overwhelming majority of advertisements to teachers focus on the Announcement or Price approach, while the Benefit and Questions approach are both rarely used even though they are much more effective than the Announcement or Price approach.

**For clarity here is an example of each of these four approaches**

**The announcement:** “One day course on the behaviour management of difficult pupils. The course consists of...”

**The advert based on price:** “10% discount on the one day course on behaviour management of difficult pupils if you book before January 15<sup>th</sup>.”

**The benefit driven advert:** “Reduce the incidence of poor behaviour in your school by 50% within one week.”

**The interesting open question:** “What is the most effective way of reducing the incidence of poor behaviour in your school?”

Overall this is about delivering a message that is read, understood and acted upon.

### **3. PERFORMING**

Getting teachers excited about a product or service is only part of the task of selling to schools. What one also has to do is to:

- a) ensure that making the purchase is easy for the school, and that
- b) good relationships with the school are maintained thereafter.

a) is generally relatively easy in that all you have to do is allow them to order via fax, email, post, phone or on-line, and make it clear that you will deliver when the school wants, and then invoice after the event..

After that you need to ensure that the school either get the product quickly – or they get a note telling them when it will arrive, and reassure them that you are on hand to answer any questions that they have.

b) is a matter of building a list of your past customers and staying in touch with your customers to ensure their long term goodwill, to encourage them to refer your product on to their colleagues and to ensure that they buy upgrades and new products when available.

Some firms argue that there is no point in doing this, since they only sell one product and once you have it, that's it. But teachers like to know what other teachers think, so even in the extreme case that you will never sell another product to a teacher once he/she has bought from you, there's still a good reason to stay in touch, because teachers telling other teachers how brilliant your product is, is one of the best ways of selling.

This final point sounds so simple and easy, and yet Hamilton House research suggests that no more than one company in 200 actually does this. While a few companies send out advertisements every couple of weeks, very few indeed send out regular messages with help, support, tips, answers to questions, etc ,to past customers – all of which will put the teacher in the right frame of mind to buy from the company again. As a result, teachers feel that companies have no real interest in them and so tend to move on to another supplier next time around.

Overall this is about making the sale easy, and then either encouraging a second purchase or, if there is nothing else to buy, encouraging the teacher to tell colleagues that they ought to buy from you too.

### **Positioning, promoting, performing and Velocity**

The Velocity programme from Hamilton House meets all the prime marketing requirements of our customers, including a thorough review of and (where appropriate) action upon the issues of position, promoting and performing.

Of course, many companies who join with us on the Velocity programme already have one or two of these areas completely resolved, in which case we can focus on the one or two that remain. For such companies we might well agree that much of the Velocity programme will consist of the writing and transmission of marketing emails.

That is part of the great benefit of Velocity – through its flexibility it allows us to focus on whatever area/s of work you require.

### **The Velocity Report**

Once you have signed up to Velocity, we will undertake a review of your marketing programme and provide you with a brief written report in which we outline how we believe we should proceed and which areas need particular action.

This report is open for discussion, and once both sides are in agreement we will go ahead with our work based on that agreement. However, you can be assured that the work is not fixed, and can be changed so as to focus on other areas of work at any time.

Join us in Velocity Education. For more information please click here <http://www.velocity.ac/education.html> or call 01536 399 000 and ask to speak to one of the Velocity Team.

**Postscript: The psychology of perception**

This study relates to the way in which individuals see words and picture on a computer screen and on paper, and how their willingness to read the words and look at the document is affected by the positioning of each item, the use of colour and so on.

If you would like to know more on this you might care to look at:

Colour: <http://www.theory.bz/factor9.html> - you may believe colour is always good, but often it isn't

Copywriting: <http://www.theory.bz/factor14.html> - how to do it to make it work

Focus Zone: <http://www.theory.bz/factor29.html> - when the reader picks up a piece of direct mail, what does he or she see first? Probably not what you expect.