

12 The role of marketing

When we began this book we attempted to reveal a new, more educationally-grounded approach to the marketing of higher education. The two distinct Parts have first built an argument in favour of using the tools of marketing, but in ways that help the educational values of higher education flourish. We are not sure this is or will be the case unless a more fundamental assessment of the use of marketing in higher education is undertaken and this book is intended as our contribution. Moreover, we have suggested in Part II how we might be able to harness marketing tools for the benefit of higher education.

In doing so we have suggested two main models for development of marketing higher education; at the strategic level, the CORD model developed by Felix Maringe, and at the marketing practical level, the trust-based model developed by Paul Gibbs. Together we think they can shape an approach to higher education. In this chapter we want to further develop this idea in the context of higher education and especially in relation to the ethical dimension of marketing, a constantly recurring theme in this book.

The risks of marketing higher education

The marketing literature on advertising and autonomy is extensive and concentrates on persuasive advertising, as this seems more controversial than straightforward presentation of information. Central to this literature is the seminal paper of Crisp (1987), where he offers an approach based on a model of consumers open to violation of their autonomy at the hands of manipulative copy and images. Indeed, he argues that that persuasive advertising may 'occupy the motivational territory properly belonging to the agent [consumer]' (1987: 414). He may well have a point, but his argument has no place for the advertising-literate consumer who reads the advertising verbiage for entertainment. To some extent this is Arrington's (1982) argument when he gives us four ways of understanding 'autonomy', and argues that, in each case, advertising does not violate it.

Plausible as Arrington's claims may be, Crisp's reasoning is still valid in the context of persuasion leading to actions over which the subject feels no control. In this sense advertising becomes propaganda for the vulnerable, like his example of subliminal advertising, and is violating and exploitative. Lippke's (1989) contribution is an important view of the argument when it applies to advertising. Moreover he has developed a position on advertising being exploitation based on the premise that advertising subverts and suppresses the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and motivations necessary for autonomy. Specifically with reference to advanced capitalistic economies, it does this by inducing beliefs and wants conducive to the economic and political interest of the owners of the production of the advertising and subjugates the consumer to these through advertising's control of mass media.

Not surprisingly, these wants and desire may not be 'good' in Aristotle's sense, where the 'good life' is achieved through rational happiness achieved through education of the socially situated autonomous individual, not compliance to images of satisfaction. In doing so it exploits the student as consumer by substituting their well-being for the well-being obtained through the explicit financial or ideological satisfaction of knowledge production rather than the implicit values of transformation. By linking a valued notion – liberal education – with trivial and incongruent images of hedonism, it exploits the common resources of state education by connecting it with some socio-economic valued yet educationally worthless experience. In so doing, we affect the worth of both (Jeurissen 2005). Indeed, it is to the university that we might look to develop our ability to recognize that advertising is designed to persuade us of a particular ideology of the good life and to offer us skills to decide to accept, reject or resist this or other ideologies.

It follows, we think, that if persuasive advertising is eroding educational values directly or by association, it is detrimental to the realization of autonomous educated people in the sense of their intent and action. If this proposition is valid, then it is morally dangerous to use advertising to promote the process of educating the autonomous individual through recruitment advertisements when no such education is provided. In this case such a strategy contains a contradiction and duplicity.

Moreover, if educational advertising is adopting images of mass culture, it is devaluing the authority of the university to stand back so as to question that culture. If so, it seems plausible it will maintain its own self-interest by harnessing the consumption ideology that sweeps all before it. Indeed, Adorno's (2001) and Giroux's (2004) discussion of the responsibility of education illustrates the risks that society in general runs as its universities drift towards reflecting mass culture and its marketing technologies. They have pleaded for education to face the realities of the society it is building

under the architect of capitalism. The influence of the market on all areas of our economy need not be rehearsed again here. It is sufficient to point to the increased dependence of the university on sponsorships, commercial research, alumni funding, recruitment (enrolment management), endowments and encumbered government funding; even the pretence of institutional independency is being eroded in the collegiate system, to be replaced by managerialism (see Bok 2003; Kirp 2004). That Lyotard's 'dehumanization' is occurring in the very institutions once able to question society, to enable choice and to prevent the inhumanities of collective thinking is, as Waide (1987) comments, predictive of the role of advertising.

From this perspective, the notion of education is perverted by fore-shortening its scope and horizons to provide trained workers and ceases to be education; it is an economic exchange that repays the workers, the students, handsomely over their lifetime. Although the economic is important, it has become a totalizing ideology that is turning education into a commodity so that it can be more readily marketed. The potential cost of this market transformation is a devaluation of liberal education's virtues of tolerance, critical thinking, trust and benevolence. The duplicity is that the advertisements offer values using the very tools the message is working against, and that this is done knowingly to increase recruitment.

We believe the university sector is facing a crisis in terms of its values as competition intensifies and, as Veloutsou et al. (2005: 279) state, institutions increasingly are 'engaging in professional marketing activities'. Furthermore Veloutsou et al.'s study concluded that the 'final chance to "sell" the goods and clinch the sale is still greatly influenced by informational sources under the direct control of the university' (2005: 289). They go further to declare that even though the content is entirely satisfactory, if it is not attractive enough – persuasive enough? – the sale will be lost. Although this is not expressed in our choice of language, the message seems all too clear; if universities don't use the promotional tool of marketing, they risk failing to recruit.

In more restrained language, Ivy (2001) argues that the image portrayed by institutions of higher education plays a critical role in how the institutions are perceived, by its stakeholders, including its competitive position with rivals. In Arpan et al.'s (2003) study of major American universities, they found that various non-academic aspects of the universities (for example, athletics) contributed highly to the universities' reputation. We are unaware of any study to look at the content of the advertising used by universities to induce positive responses, whether persuasive or just informative, but it would seem naïve to assume that persuasive advertising is not being used when UK universities recently responded to the increase of top-up fees and their need to provide bursaries by offering incentives 'either in addition to cash bursaries or as standalone offerings. For example, some

students could expect to receive travel passes, laptops, vouchers for bicycles, sports centre passes and art equipment' (Office of Fair Access 2005). Returning to Veloutsou et al. (2005), one of the concerning features of their work is the distinction they draw between promotional (we assume persuasive) material and informational. The risk of exploitation seems self-evident in the competitive times facing higher education.

These are messages that, if correct, might frighten vice-chancellors or presidents into reaching for the nearest advertising agency, but what ought to concern them is the cause of this frenzy for recruitment. Who benefits? What positive impact is it having on society? What is it doing to the essence of higher education? The problem may not be inherent in the notion of advertising, but in the market mechanism. To resist both the market and its methods would require an act of defiance; one that confronted the duplicity of advertising to reduce autonomous choice while advocating a transformative process based upon the nurturing of autonomy.

Affordance of a marketing orientation

Notwithstanding the above cautionary stance, it is important to end this book by looking at the value of adopting a marketing orientation for university institutions. We reiterate our position that marketing is more than a set of functional activities such as advertising, public relations and selling. We believe that criticisms of marketing as an unethical practice, unsuited for higher education arise, in part at least, because marketing is often ordinarily associated with these activities. While they constitute important elements of marketing, they are nevertheless not its defining basis.

In this book, we define university marketing as an underlying cultural and organizational disposition to position the customer at the centre of all decisions in the critical tripartite university business of teaching, research and service. We see it as an organizational strategy aimed at creating and delivering value to its customers. Central to this mission is the need to keep customers happy regarding the way the university executes this core business. Given the importance of universities in the socio-economic and cultural development of societies, the ever-changing nature of the human and societal conditions, together with the global influences and the accelerating technological development, universities can no longer conduct their business on an *ad hoc* run-of-the-mill, short-term basis.

The need for a strategic marketing approach is not only urgent but obligatory. For two decades marketing in education has been on the march, but has been found to be inchoate (Foskett 1995; Smith et al. 1995); operational rather than strategic (Maringe 2004); poorly staffed; and removed from the core business of the university (Marlinge 2005b; Helmsley-

Brown and Oplatka 2007). As higher education operates in a dynamic marketplace where competition, consumers, technology and the market forces persistently exert pressure to change, universities need to adopt a strategic marketing approach to help them look beyond the immediate circumstances into the often less well-understood future. The approach transcends the tactical and operational levels to strengthen the capacity of the institution not to only predict but plan for uncertain futures. Strategy and trust are at the heart of successful university marketing. On the one hand, we need a strategic marketing approach that sits well with the core business of universities. On the other, whatever approaches used must be trusted and held in high regard by those who operate within the university and the customers who utilize its services and products. The CORD and Trust models we suggested in this book are specifically designed to accomplish those twin challenges.

Adopting a marketing orientation is no longer an optional choice in higher education and it brings two main advantages which are briefly outlined below.

The student/customer becomes the focus of decision-making

Teaching, research and service are the core missions of universities. Despite the wide-ranging arguments to the contrary, we are firmly of the belief that the student is the most important customer of the university. A key consideration in identifying what and how to teach effectively to any group of students is to thoroughly understand the students in terms of how they learn most efficiently and how they prefer to be taught. In the 1960s, Brunner once argued that any child can be taught anything, any time, as long as the teaching is done in an honest and intellectually stimulating manner. Customers treated with honesty grow to trust the organization and the institutions that serve it. They are at the heart of key decisions of the organization. The benefits of adopting a customer orientation have been well documented in the business sector. In education, this approach becomes more relevant given the increasing involvement of students in contributing monetarily towards their higher education experience.

Issues of value for money are gradually taking centre stage in students' union charters and campaigns for the improvement of services and quality of educational provision. Thus, rather than remaining at the periphery of decision-making, students are increasingly becoming an integral part of the core business of universities. Whether it is the design of curriculum, the planning of a variety of service encounters, library and accommodation services among others, student input and views become integral to the university's decision-making and strategic planning. A customer focus will

thus revolutionize the way universities conduct their core business of teaching, learning, research, and community service.

A new axis for university business

The perennial debate about the relationship between research, teaching and their relative significance in the mission of universities is based on an incompatibility theory (Baker and MacLean 2004) in which research enjoys higher status than teaching in the academic professions. However, we agree with Beyer and Liston (1996) that the separation of research from teaching presents a false dichotomy, as the two activities reinforce each other in ways that make the world more comprehensible. We would like to propose that research and teaching be viewed more broadly from a curriculum point of view, based on the understanding that the curriculum is all the experiences planned by the educational institution for the benefit of its students. Viewed that way, research and teaching are unified and become, in the words of Beyer and Liston, the centrepiece of university business. The curriculum-focused model for higher education marketing (Maringe 2004) has been developed on that basis and provides a new axis for conceptualizing and executing university business.