A Content Analysis of
Educational Advertising
in Canterbury

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Abstract

There is growing interest and evidence in the New Zealand education sector of the application of marketing principles and techniques. This has been brought about, in part, by a declining birth rate and a more market-driven economy. Faced by such changes educational institutions have increased their efforts to attract external funding and students. Advertising is one obvious way they have been doing this. This phenomenon, also reported in the UK, USA and Australia (Hayes, 1991; Pelletier, 1985; Stewart, 1991) in the past decade, is the focus of this paper.

An initial investigation of New Zealand educational advertising research revealed little evidence of prior work in this field although overseas, institutional advertising appears to have attracted more research interest (McNamara,1985; Abernathy and Butler, 1992; Chamblee and Sandler, 1992).

Given the limited budgets of many local educators, and their lack of marketing expertise, how are these managers promoting their services and how well are they doing this? The researchers examined these questions using educational advertisements collected over a five month period. Copy was then analysed using content analysis. Results indicated a heavy use of informative advertising, and a now 'buy' format. A high percent also list course components or subjects being offered, and provide contact names and numbers. These advertisements are, therefore, primarily akin to sales promotions.

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1.   Introduction

New Zealand is no longer an isolated nation shielded from the rest of the world by the protectionist policies of its earlier governments. In the past decade local institutions and companies, in both the private and public sectors, have been party to an on-going government opening process. This has resulted in increased competitiveness in most industries, downsizing and closures, and a significant rethinking of the way most organisations are managed.

Educators have not escaped this drive toward greater market-driven efficiency and effectiveness. Faced by diminishing dollars from the state purse, legislative changes, a drop in the birth rate, and more private educators, many school, college, university and polytechnic administrators have been adopting some of the marketing and business practices they had previously shunned. Advertising, typically viewed as being 'marketing' by those not in the profession, has been one the most commonly used marketing tools. Student recruitment, fund-raising, and creating awareness about forthcoming courses, at first glance, appear to be the main objectives for this.

Preliminary investigations revealed scant evidence of New Zealand research pertaining to institutional advertising, the exception being Eagle and Kenneth (1992). The researchers, therefore, examine and present the findings of a 'snapshot' study of advertising practices in the Canterbury region of New Zealand. This is an area covering 392 square kilometres and more than 253 educational institutions.

Advertisements were collected from two major Cantabrian newspapers over a five month period. Of particular interest was how these new marketers were using advertising and what patterns were emerging about this form of local advertising. A database consisting of 242 advertisements was collected and then analysed using content analysis (Stern, Krugman, and Resnik, 1981).

The objectives of the research are initially discussed, then a broad overview of educational advertising follows. The researchers proceed, outlining the foundations of content analysis and the propositions that are to be tested. The research coding scheme is next developed. After analysis involving three independent judges, the advertising practices of Cantabrian educators are reviewed at both a macro and micro level. Recommendations based on marketing principles and earlier advertising research findings are finally presented.

2.   Research Objectives

Typically, educational administrators in this country come from a teaching background. Often they have either had three years of teacher training (subjects being mainly related to child and curriculum development) or they have an undergraduate degree and one year condensed teacher training. There is, at the most, very little in their background that relates to business procedures and managing in a turbulent environment.   The exception, however, may be more recent appointments to university and polytechnic management positions. In-house training and outside courses may also be provided in some circumstances. These nevertheless are usually very short affairs.

When conditions in any environment change quite radically those living in such circumstances are forced to change their behaviour if they wish to survive. This is just as true of management as it is of any living organism.   New Zealand educators, with no knowledge of how to develop a promotional campaign, how to create or manage a brand or image, and other such strategically important techniques, are suddenly finding these tools a necessary part of today's institutional control. Certainly the larger institutions, the polytechnics and universities, are hiring professionals to overcome this problem. Schools and colleges, most of whom are in the compulsory education sector, however, have limited access to funds. They are, therefore, forced to market themselves, unless parental expertise or assistance from industry is provided.

A glance at newspapers and magazines in New Zealand in the past few years reveals an increasing use of the print media by many of these institutions. There has, however, been a corresponding lack of local research about this growing practice. This research sets out to rectify some of this gap by examining advertisements of Cantabrian educators.   Analysis will provide an overview of the current advertising practices of local primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Suggestions will be made as to what institutions could do to increase the effectiveness of their promotional practices.

3.   Advertising and Education

The idea of advertising strikes some educators as new, although educators were using advertising more than 2000 years ago. As Kotler and Fox (1985: 301-302) pointed out, the Greek sophists (teachers, doctors and other wandering professionals of their day), publicly:

"Made high display of their acquirement, and gave exhibitions of eloquence and of argument to show the value of their wares. In more recent times - 1869 - an ad for Harvard College appeared on the outside cover of Harper's Magazine, and created - according to one commentator, "Such a thing as had never been heard of before. It was as if Noah had put up posters on the cliffs of Armenia to announce that the ark was to open on such a day."

This furore of educational advertising is still being heard today. Detractors argue paid advertising is a waste of time and resources, taking scarce funding away from already cash-strapped educational programs and cheapening the hallowed halls of academia. One recent example is McNamara (1985:62):

Marketing is for the market-place – the corporate, for-profit marketplace where goods and services are exchanged for money in competition with other vendors who peddle similar wares, made as cheaply (sometimes reasonably) as possible, and ticketed for the best return the vendor can exact. The college campus is not or at any rate, should not be a marketplace. It is, or ought to be, a community of scholars, a place of teaching and learning, the setting for scholarly discourse, experimentation, and discovery. There is no profit motive beyond the reward that knowledge imparts to the questioning mind. The text in which it can resemble the conventional marketplace is in its status, devoid of the mercurial marketplace of ideas. The recent rush of educators into the arena of marketing, alien territory just a few years ago, will go down as one of the most rash decisions and saddest days in the history of American higher education.

Kotler, one of the doyennes of marketing, however, counters arguing those who are repelled by the advertising of their institutions seem to conveniently overlook other forms of paid advertising already widely used by educators such as bulletins, direct mail pamphlets and letters, and announcements about programs in the press (Kotler and Fox, 1985: 304).

Doubtless the battle about advertising by the teaching and academic professions will continue as long as it continues to be utilised. And, in New Zealand at least, advertising now appears to be well entrenched in the management practices of our larger and better resourced institutions. What then is advertising? What does it encompass and what does it attempt to achieve in relation to

educational establishments?   These issues must be understood, if only to be better informed to take part in this debate.

Advertising consists of *"non-personal forms of communication conducted through paid media under clear sponsorship"* (Kotler and Fox, 1985: 304). It attempts to *"persuade people to take a particular course of action, or to reach a point of view"*. (Wilmshurst J., 1985: 135). Its many forms include mass media such as magazines and newspapers, television, outdoor displays like posters, signs and billboards, direct mail, and novelties such as calendars, pens, posters, catalogues, directories, and circulars. These all assist to build the image and reputation of an organisation, and its products or services by carefully presenting messages to a selected audience.

Content analysis, as alluded to earlier, was identified as the most suitable technique for analysing this collection of Cantabrian advertisements. It is a methodology that measures print in subject-matter categories and was developed at the turn of the century when mass production techniques heralded huge increases in newsprint volumes. Later, with the advent of new technologies and other forms of mass media, this analysis was extended to researching radio-based data, then to movies and television (Krippendorff, K.,1980: 14).   In the fifties and sixties it gained even greater attention and today continues to be applied in a variety of contexts; for example to analyse textbooks, comic strips, speeches, and advertising.

Berelson, 1952 (quoted in Krippendorff, 1980: 5) provides the following definition of content analysis. It is "*a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication*". In a similar vein Krippendorf (1980: 14) states it is a tool and:

> "*Research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data, in context. By far the greater part of research in historical studies is qualitative in nature. This is so because the proper subject-matter of historical research consists to a great extent of verbal and other symbolic material emanating from a society's or a culture's past. The basic skills required of the researcher to analyse this kind of qualitative or symbolic material involve collecting, classifying, ordering, synthesising, evaluating and interpreting. At the basis of all these acts lies sound personal judgement. In the comparatively recent past, however, attempts have been made to apply the quantitative methods of the*

The methodology used by authors in this paper could be better understood by the following scheme in Figure 1.
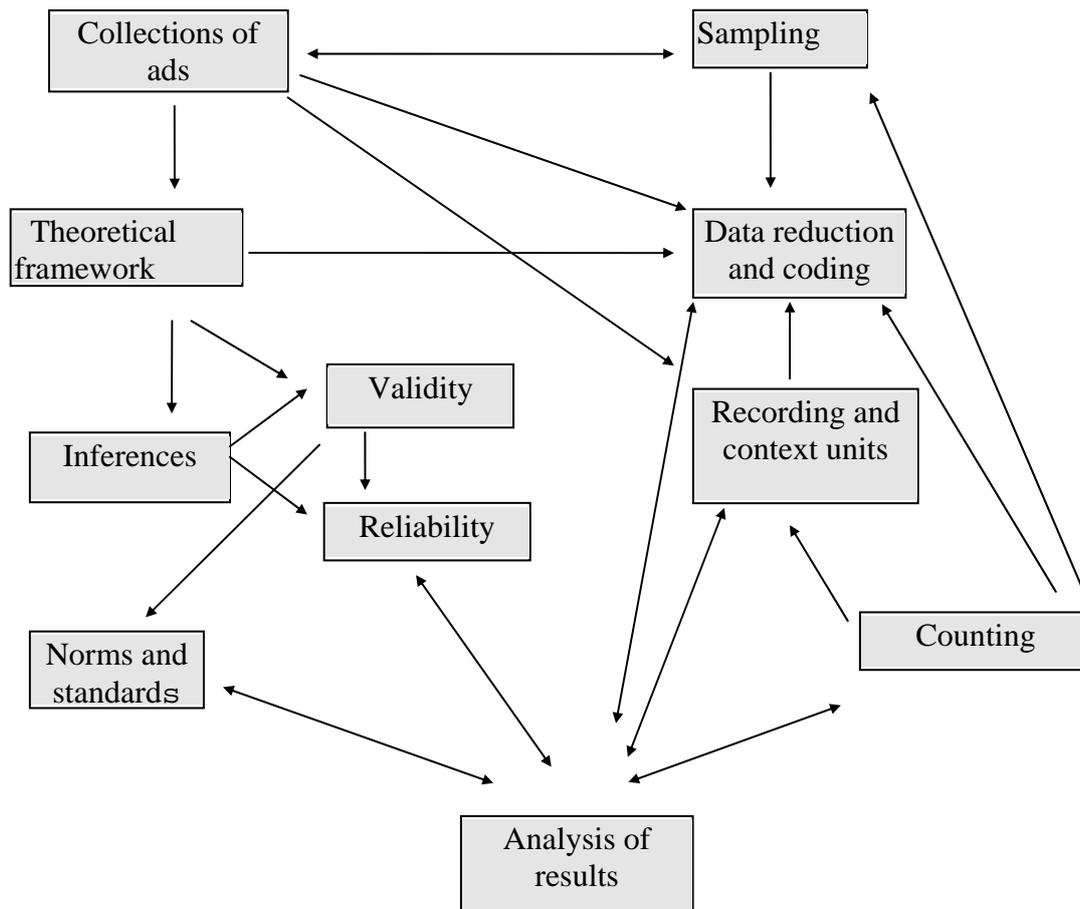
Source: Based on Krippendorff (1980), and Carney (1972).

Figure 1: Content Analysis Methodology

4.   Research Propositions

The experience of the researchers in the education sector and newspaper industry, combined with their knowledge of advertising research, led to the development of the following propositions to be tested by the study;

P1   *Tertiary institutions more frequently advertise in newspapers than secondary or primary schools.*

P2   *Primary institutions are less likely to advertise than either secondary or tertiary ones.*

P3   *Private primary and secondary schools are more likely to advertise than state-funded schools.*

P4   *Non-secular[1] primary and secondary schools are more likely to use moral and emotional copy than their secular counterparts.*

P5   *Overall, all educational advertisements are more likely to be informative, than emotional, moral or rational.*

P6   *Most primary and secondary advertisements are akin to sales promotions. They attempt to elicit an immediate purchase.*

P7   *Tertiary institutions' advertisements are more frequently replicated as part of a promotional campaign.*

5.   The Research

The study was confined to educational advertisements in newspapers in the Canterbury region, in New Zealand's South Island, over a five month period. Canterbury was selected as the geographical boundary for the investigation as researchers were confident that this would provides a large enough database to test the propositions. This area, covering 392 square kilometres, is the home of more than 253 educational institutions (NZ Education Directory, 1995). Newspapers were found to be the most common medium used by educational advertisers to promote their services. For this reason, as well as because of ease of access, the two major Cantabrian papers, the Christchurch Press and the Sunday Star Times, were targeted.

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[1]These schools are integrated schools funded by the state, but with a "special character" which entitles them to teach subjects that make them different from state schools, e.g. religion. Many private schools also have religious affiliations.

A coding scheme, later to be used in copy analysis, was developed while advertisements were being identified and recorded. This was formulated on the basis of the recommendations and findings of earlier advertising researchers (Stern et al., 1981; Rajaratnam and Madden, 1995; Belch and Belch, 1995). The categories of information central to this study were identified as the nature of the buying proposal, the vividness of the advertisement, frequency of repeat advertisements, and use of logo and pictures.

The buying proposal is the central message of the advertisement. It refers to its basic appeal and tells why the audience should purchase the product or service (Dommermuth, W.,1989: 241).

It is also sometimes referred to as the USP (unique selling proposition). A wide variety of basic appeal categories have been identified by researchers (Stern, et al. 1981; Kotler and Fox, 1985; Chamblee and Sander, 1992) but as yet there is no clear agreement as to which categories are most appropriate for categorising data. Rational, emotional, moral and informative information, however, were commonly identified by researchers for unitising advertising content. For this reason they were used in this analysis.

Researchers such as Twible and Hensel (1991) identified the importance of designing vivid advertisements. These were classified as being *'emotionally interesting, concrete and imaginary provoking, and proximate in a sensory, temporal and spatial way'* (Twible and Hensel, 1991: 378-383).

This classification was used by the researchers to capture the likely audience impact of the educational advertisements. It was also broadened and tangibilised to include commentary on the use of illustrations, print type and colour in copy. Earlier evidence had suggested these were important features in making an advertisement memorable (Twible and Hensel, 1991: 379).

Final coding categories developed for the study were frequency of an advertisement, and a count of logo or crest. These coding forms were used to establish if institutions appeared to be developing a campaign format for their promotional exercises or whether newspaper advertisements were one-off, with no evidence of longer term positioning or brand management needs.

Table 1, based on the work of Stern, Resnik and Krugman (1981), Belch and Belch (1995), Abernathy and Butler (1992), and Rajaratnam and Madden (1995), provides an overview of the final coding categories selected.

Table 1
Appeal Category Coding

Rational	Emotional - (Personal & Social)		Moral	Informative
1. Feature appeal	1. Safety	10. Recognition	1. Environment	1. Price/value
2. Comparative advantage	2. Security	11. Status	2. Equality	2. Quality
3. Prod/Service popularity	3. Love	12. Respect	3. Freedom	3. Performance
4. Favourable price appeal	4. Affection	13. Involvement	4. Family	4. Components
5. News appeals	5. Happiness	14. Embarrassment	5. Caring	5. Availability
	6. Joy	15. Affiliation	6. Dedicated/ committed	6. Special offer
	7. Nostalgia	16. Belonging	7. Spiritual	7. Independent research
	8. Sentiment	17. Rejection		8. Institution research
		18. Acceptance		9. New ideas

Following the collection of data and the design of coding schedules training was organised for the three independent judges who were to perform the content analysis. All judges had prior research experience. Training included debriefing on the selected coding categories and the provision of written explanations for each code. Sample advertisements were then provided for judges to independently analyse. Judges then compared their responses and the ensuing discussions were used to clarify any coding anomalies. The basic appeal of an advertisement was established based on the dominant principle. Judges were required to count the number of times each individual copy used an identifiable appeal, thus, if an advertisement used emotive wording more than purely rational, informative or moral appeals it was deemed to be primarily emotive in content.

6.   Analysis and Results

Kassarjian (1977: 8-18) suggested an intercoder reliability of 80-85 percent is acceptable for content analysis research. Intercoder reliability averaged 98 percent for this study, well exceeding these guidelines. This was achieved using a three step process. After individual judging, based on Table 1, the judges' responses were recorded on a spreadsheet. Any discrepancies in coding categories were then highlighted and discussed in an open forum. In most instances a consensus was reached about the content of the advertisements in question.

Canterbury has a total of 253 educators (Table 2). This figure includes all establishments in the compulsory education sector and excludes all private post-compulsory institutions except polytechnics and universities. Private tertiary training schemes were overlooked because their programs varied so much in content and standards, and because current directories already seemed to be out of date.

Table 2
Canterbury Advertising

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Primary	206 6*	40	40	38	2	6 (5)	2 (1)	8 (6)	3.8	2.9	0.9	0.19
Secondary	44 12*	44	31	9	22	3 (3)	9	12 (3)	27.2	6.8	20.4	0.70
Tertiary	3	157	101	-	101	-	3	3	100	-	100	33.6
Total	253 17*	241	172	47	125			23				0.67

* Private schools within total segment category.

Non-secular schools in brackets (private and integrated/state-funded schools) within the total segment category.

> 1. *Total number of Educators in Canterbury*
> 2. *Total number of Collected Ads*
> 3. *Total number of Ads from Canterbury Educators*
> 4. *Total number of Ads of Private Canterbury Educators*
> 5. *Total number of Ads of State Canterbury Educators*
> 6. *Total number of Private Canterbury-Educators Advertising*
> 7. *Total number of State Canterbury-Educators Advertising*
> 8. *Total number of Canterbury-Educators Advertising (6+7)*
> 9. *Percentage of Total Educators Advertising (8: 1)*
> 10. *Percentage of Private Educators Advertising (6: 1)*
> 11. *Percentage of State Educators Advertising (7:1)*
> 12. *Number of Ads per Educator (3:1)*

Over a five month period 241 educational advertisements were gathered from the two major Cantabrian papers, 172 of these were from local educational advertisers (71%) and 69 (29%) from educational organisations outside the Canterbury region. Only Cantabrian advertisements were selected for content analysis. In the compulsory schooling sector in Canterbury there are 206 primary schools, five of which are private institutions. There are 44 secondary schools or colleges.

Twelve of these are privately operated. There are three organisations in the tertiary sector (Table 2).

Informative advertising was predominantly used by Canterbury educators from all types of institutions (81%). Rational and emotional appeals were the next most commonly used (7.53%) copy. Emotive advertisements were used by almost five percent (4.65%) of this group of educators and moral appeals only appeared 4 percent of the time (Table 3).

Table 3
Advertising Appeals

	Inform.	%	Emot. Inform.	%	Ration Inform.	%	Emot.	%	Moral	%
Primary	19	11.1	2	1.16	12	6.9	-	-	7	4.1
Secondary	25	14.5	-	-	1	0.58	5	2.9	-	-
Tertiary	96	55.8	2	1.16	-	-	3	1.74	-	-
Total	140	81.4	4	2.32	13	7.53	8	4.65	7	4.1

* Appeals that combine emotive and informative copy, and rational and informative copy.

Table 4
"Buy Now" Advertising Appeals

	Total	R5-News Appeal	14: Components	15: Availability
Primary	40	20 (50%)	17 (42.5%)	25 (62.5%)
Secondary	31	23 (74%)	24 (77%)	28 (90%)
Tertiary	101	8 (7.9%)	88 (87%)	101 (100%)

Source: Based on Table 1, R5 refers to rational appeals with new elements (such as application for scholarships), I4 refers to information about subjects or courses offered, I5 refers to informative appeals explaining who to contact.

Proposition testing revealed the following:

P1   As Table 3 identifies, there were 101 tertiary advertisements despite the fact there were only two universities and one polytechnic in the group being studied. In other words of the 253 educators in Canterbury (20 of these advertised) a mere 1 percent accounted for nearly 59 percent of the recorded advertisements. Thus proposition 1 was upheld.

P2   This proposition was only partially confirmed. As Table 3 depicts, 23 percent of all advertisements from Canterbury were from primary schools and 18 percent from secondary institutions. Primary schools were less likely to advertise than local tertiary establishments, however, they did advertise more than secondary schools. Proposition 2 was, therefore, only partially supported.

P3   As Table 2 reveals 16 percent of all Canterbury advertisements were from private primary institutions and 5 percent from private secondary schools. State operated primary schools advertised almost 2 percent of the time and state secondary institutions 5 percent. This proposition, therefore is only partly correct. Private primary schools do advertise more than their state counterparts, however, state secondary schools advertise more frequently than private ones.

P4   This proposition could not be confirmed. As Table 2 identifies there were six primary non-secular schools, two primary secular, three secondary non-secular institutions and nine secular ones. Primary non-secular schools used mainly informative copy. Of the three secondary non-secular institutions one used emotional appeals and the other informative copy. The only primary secular school in the study did use moral copy. The secondary secular schools predominantly used informative appeals. Proposition 4, therefore, could not be upheld as sample size was insufficient to prove this.

P5   More than 81 percent of all analysed advertisements were categorised as primarily informative (Table 3). Eleven percent of primary institutions used informative copy, 14.5 percent of all secondary schools used this type of appeal, and 55.8 percent of tertiary institutions also. This proposition was, therefore correct.

P6   This proposition was developed based on the assumption that most educational primary and secondary advertisements were of an 'enrol now' or 'call now' variety, mentioned new courses on offer or listed program components with accompanying contact numbers. All included this type of data, even tertiary schools. None advertised purely to build brand awareness or a long term image, therefore, this proposition was correct (Table 4).

P7   Tertiary institutions appear to have made a more obvious effort to built awareness and an institutional image. This was established based on a decision to count the frequency of repeat advertisements during the five month period of the study. Lincoln University placed ten advertisements in October and 13 in November. There were no advertisements recorded prior to this. Of the 23 identified, 78.3 percent were repeat advertisements. All included a picture and logo. Christchurch Polytechnic put 22 advertisements in newspapers in August, seven in September, three in October, and 31 in November. Of the total polytechnic advertisements 49 percent were repeats. All included logo in copy. The University of Canterbury placed four advertisements in August, one in September, eight in October, and two in November newspapers. Seventy percent were repeats, 40 percent included pictures. Secondary and primary schools, however, had only 22 percent, and 43 percent repeated copies, respectively. From this we can conclude this proposition is correct.

7.   Conclusions and Recommendations

The typical Canterbury educational advertisement uses informative appeals, is of a now 'buy' format, includes course components, and provides contact names and numbers. Many use logos or school crests (83%) and a picture (53%). Most also use bold typeface (48%) and black and white print (93%), which is common to newspaper copy. As was expected, tertiary institutions advertise more frequently than the compulsory sector and also make more frequent use of repeat copy. It was surprising to find that private primary schools accounted for such a high percentage of local advertisements, far more so than for private and state secondary schools.

Most primary and secondary schools have very limited access to funds. They either design advertisements themselves or rely on less expensive advertising agencies or smaller, less frequent, newspaper placements. Polytechnics and universities are also financially constrained in promotional spending, especially in comparison to their commercial colleagues. There are, nevertheless, a number of basic considerations that all of these groups would do well to think about if they wish to ensure scarce funding is used for maximum advantage.

Researchers such as Twible and Hensel (1991: 378-383) have identified the importance of designing vivid advertisements. These were classified as being '*emotionally interesting, concrete and imaginary provoking, and proximate in a sensory, temporal and spatial way*'. Earlier evidence (George and Berry, 1981: 407-411) had suggested these were important features in making an advertisement memorable and credible. Thus, advertisements can be made more vivid by including emotive, and persuasive, language and a more detailed and explicit central message. While local advertisers did make good use of bold typeface, logos, and pictures it was the subjective opinion of judges that the total impact of the identified advertisements was predominantly weak. More could be done to use symbols that convey a sense of what the organisation stands for and how it positions itself.

All advertising efforts should also consider the importance of frequency. This refers invariably to multiple use of the same image. Even in advertisements placed for different purposes, an overall image should be included to reinforce the organisation's longer term objectives. As George and Berry noted advertising helps establish; "*certain distinctive symbols, formats, and/or themes to build and reinforce the desired image, regardless of any changes in specific advertising campaign*" (George, and Berry, 1981: 407-411). Thus, where themes are repeated, overtime they have a cumulative effect and assist to position an organisation relative to others in the same sector. For educational advertisers this means making absolutely clear to management and outside personnel who work for the organisation, that all promotional activities or publications entering the public domain should enhance the institutional image. A positioning statement, therefore, needs to appear in all business plans. Symbols that support this image must then be identified and incorporated, where possible, in any communications with internal and external groups. This includes those advertisements seeking an immediate response.

Finally, since purchasers of educational services are buying a promise of a performance, some thought should be given to providing indications of quality performance standards or referrals in advertising copy. This should form part of the total promotional strategy. Service researchers have proven that services, because of their intangible nature, are difficult, even risky, for potential purchasers to evaluate. Some thought needs to be given to ensuring that copy includes tangible evidence that assists the search decision process.

Advertising, however, is only one element in the total marketing plan. Used on its own it is like a ship without a rudder or a boat in a storm. To be successful, managers should recognise the need to

anchor their advertisements in well-honed strategies, based on the long term objectives of the organisation and the position they wish to achieve for it. Thus, managers need to establish the strengths and weaknesses of their institution compared to competitors, the opportunities and threats in the wider environment, and finally where they would like to see themselves in relation to all of this. Every effort then needs to be made to co-ordinate all organisational activities to that end. Even in instances where immediate action is sought, for example donations and enrolment, managers need to ensure longer term goals have been considered and the tone of the advertising copy aligns with these. It is also good sense to incorporate any logo or motto wherever possible to assist audience recognition and recall. Advertising should then be co-ordinated with other parts of the marketing 'mix'. For educational institutions this will include decisions about school uniforms, the content and style of meetings and events, a dress code for staff, all rules and policies, even analysis about the location and entrance appeal of the institution.

This study of advertising by educational institutions in Canterbury, however, has a number of limitations. These do, nevertheless, provide opportunities for future research. First, the research confined itself to the two major newspapers in the Canterbury region. It did not include all of New Zealand or other media used by educators to advertise their services. The database also only covered a five month period of the year, even though it included the key enrolments months. Future research, therefore needs to determine if newspaper advertising strategy changes over time, and throughout the country. Other media should additionally be included in further studies. From a broader communications perspective there needs to be research on the specific types and quantities of information consumers find useful in selecting one educational provider over another. For example, are consumers more likely to choose a service that includes a greater number of informational cues in advertisements? And which specific informational cues lead consumers to select one educational provider over another? Finally, more research needs to be conducted as to the value of advertising by educators, as opposed to other promotional techniques such as direct mail, personal selling and word of mouth promotions.

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