PERSONAL BRANDING OF A TEACHER - AN APPROACH INTO E-EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Raluca Ecaterina BRANDABUR
Faculty of Marketing, Academy for Economic Studies, M. Eminescu Street, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: brandabur@mk.ase.ro

Abstract: The central character/figure of the learning process is undoubtedly the teacher. A good teacher defines the educational process, being it classical or using modern methodologies. The dynamics of the educational media was potential in the last decades by the astonishing evolution of electronic media, which leads to what today we name e-learning. The constant ratio between the educator and the student is maintained but the approach is sometimes dramatically changed. In its modern version, in terms of e-learning and marketing. Thus, the educator as a "provider of educational services" reconfirms its crucial role in this market. An approach like this, rid of "clothing" of a strictly social vision (education = social obligation) allows teachers to promote themselves and thus to promote the institute within which they operates. The principle is simple, and it is already used by private institutions of education. The difference consists in the fact that educational institutions are using their teachers notoriety to attract pupils. However, too few institutions are actually involved in building this awareness. The subject discussed in this article is the way in which the teacher builds its awareness teacher, we basically talk about the personal career management. Personal branding is about the practical arrangements by which a teacher builds its own brand which could be "sold" after that to an institution. More than ever the new technologies enable the creation, development and management of a 'teacher brand' with real and solid competitive chances on educational market.

Keywords: personal branding, educational marketing, e-educational environment

I. MARKETING A TEACHER

We are considering that is not necessary to remind that we are in the middle of the information era, and more than this, of technology as the principal way for disseminating information. Meanwhile, the educational process retains its attributes from thousands of years: a "teacher", "the disciples" and "the craft" - found at the same scale in the animal kingdom also. What would we have to say again here? And the apparently trivial answer is: marketing and IT technology, namely the marketing combined with IT technology.

Educational marketing - is about a proper managing school –student relationship considering all influential factors outside this relation [3] and is not much a novelty for a long time, being applied more or less empirically by the most educational institutions, especially the private ones, where more than anywhere, the economic mechanisms are more visible.

Technology in Education is a also concept already overused. E-learning was and still is today the subject of concern to all teachers interested in teaching performance.

As teachers, we are one of the two major determinants of the educational process. Economically speaking we are in the position of "providers" of educational services. The debate educator vs. provider have been and will remain open because the process itself of transmitting information in a comprehensive and attractive way to the learners is one that is related, in our opinion, rather of a certain native ability plus specialized courses and less than a exclusively learned technique.

1.1. Introduction

Basically, what any educational institution "sells" is the ability of its teacher to transmit the knowledge and to train to its students the professional skills required by higher education institutions and, finally, by the labour market. Therefore it becomes essential to build an image of the institution through its teachers and separate individual images of teachers themselves. In other words, we have referred specifically to the principles of educational marketing. Usually, the educational institute is managing its image and by default the image of its teachers. Teaching activity with research and scientific activity, carried in itself lead the building of an own image. Aware or not about this process, teachers' performed actions lead them to a positioning on education market which then will determine their relationships with educational institutions that offer suitable jobs. The concept of positioning means the act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the target market's mind [8]

What we are trying to emphasize is a simple principle: as teachers we are, though eminently humans, a commodity like any other. As educators, our efforts and involvement in managing our own careers, beyond the teaching activity carried out for our students in the classrooms, are those who can ensure professional satisfaction together with a desired professional position and a comfortable cash flow. Our careers need to be addressed, by ourselves, before the intervention of the institution in which we work, just exactly a product.

1.2. Teacher positioning

Positioning activity involves to follow the marketing classic steps with focusing on the creation and development of a personal brand. Steps of such activity are in number three: marketing research, development of a market strategy and then, development of marketing mix.

Marketing research means environment research. AMA define it like the function that links the consumer, customer, and public to the marketer through information--information used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve understanding of marketing as a process. Marketing research specifies the information required to address these issues, designs the method for collecting information, manages and implements the data collection process, analyses the results, and communicates the findings and their implications.[2]. Environment the milieu in which the teaching process is operating.

Marketing research is the work performed by the teacher in order to identify all three components of the marketing environment, as follow:

- external macro-environment - economic stage of the country who lead the level of income, structure of labour market (in terms of demand for his expertise), political stability, education policies, educational system (number and ownership educational units), demographics related to the population structure in age, household, education, employment, geographical location, cultural conditions;
- external micro-environment – most important are the competitors. How many teachers or other high professionals within expertise area are?, what's their market quotation?, what's their professional image among educational institutes and among students? - are most important answers for a straight picture,. Also important are the public, Mass-media, public administration, politic groups, shareholders, all these factors can create both opportunities and threats for their career;
- internal environment – teacher himself. As valuable result educator must do a self-analysis of his capabilities, skills, determination that he can prove in reaching its intended purpose.

Choosing a strategy – according McDonald is the overall route to the achievement of specific objectives and should describe the means by which objectives are to be reached, the time program and the allocation of resources [11]. The stage in which, starting from various objectives like obtaining an academic title, obtaining a research grant, getting recognition on a particular area of competence, will specifically establish the plan for the next 3-5 years horizon. We can include here: writing and publishing, conference attending, professional links, register in professional organisations.

Develop the marketing mix on the four classic parts (the four Ps): product, price, place and promotion [10].

 • product – could be anything that meets the functional needs of customers, in this case the teacher himself. It is the situation that is basically a tie between the product and what we have defined earlier as the internal environment

 • price – represents the value estimated in money of their work. Other says salary, income or cash flow in reward for teaching activity.

 • place (distribution) - is a means of getting the product into the consumer's hands, in this particular situation the educational organization (school, high-school, university)

 • promotion – traditionally means of communication between the seller-teacher and buyer educational organization or/and students. We are including here tools like: advertising, public relations using various media channels like: web, print, social networks, events, PR, alumni events, etc.

These four P's are the parameters that the teacher can control, subject to the internal and external constraints of the marketing environment.

1.3. A teacher brand

Building and effective management of own brand is part of the last component of the classical marketing mix: promotion activity. A brand can be defined as a specific name, symbol or design – or more usually, some combination of these that is used to distinguish a particular seller's product. [5].

A comparison between management of an organizational brand and an individual brand is for first of all hilarious: a network of advertisers, design agencies and visual art specialists are put to the task for executing the company's image, its message and its core competencies by comparison with a single person working for and by itself, but nowadays personal branding became very important for high professionals.

For instant a niche in marketing, personal branding is about creating the externally facing identity that person, as a business, project.[17]; the public projection of certain aspects of a person's personality, skills or values that stimulate precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for [12], the personal brand is about recognizing who you are and what you do best, and communicating that to clients [7] or a strong personal brand is a mix of reputation, trust, attention, and execution [4]. We consider personal branding as usage of marketing and sociology tools in order to develop and manage somebody's public profile and its professional career. Most literary is more about personal achievement and personal development and is written by psychologist, psychotherapist or HR specialists, and for this reason the approach is more or less managerial and from here some gaps into a real strategic brand plan.

Brand strategy describe how the brand intends to attract and even create customers and advance them beyond the reach of competitors. A well-defined and executed personal brand strategy affects all aspects of a career and is directly connected to consumer needs, emotions, and also to competitive environments.

Main problem becomes here a proper definition of customer , in terms of a teacher brand. We propose such approach like a magazine as follow, reach target for a magazine are the readers , with a specific socio-psycho-demographic profile, but real target are the companies whose products are claimed in the magazine. Also the teacher has to targets: students and educational organizations. A way to reach the second one trough the first, but the order is not so exclusive like from the magazines. A good image among students does not guarantee a job at a prestigious educational organization, or a good image among educational organizations does not guarantee respect and recognition of teaching abilities.

And here we walk again on quicksand because, a modern teacher is evaluate differently by students who main interest are his pedagogical abilities and open mindedness, while educational organization is oriented to professors with a good scientific reputation enabling to attract students, research contracts and fundraising.

Brand identity is all that an organization wants the brand to be considered as[1] Brand identity the key to a functional brand strategy. Main determinants are described into next figure (figure 1)
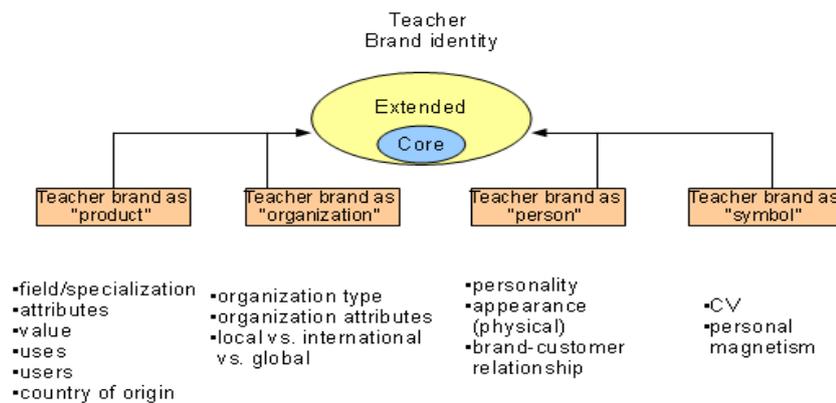
Teacher
Brand identity

Extended

Core

Teacher brand as "product" | Teacher brand as "organization" | Teacher brand as "person" | Teacher brand as "symbol"

- field/specialization
- attributes
- value
- uses
- users
- country of origin

- organization type
- organization attributes
- local vs. international vs. global

- personality
- appearance (physical)
- brand-customer relationship

- CV
- personal magnetism

Figure 1. Teacher brand identity, adaptation after Aacker [1]

The brand-as-product. The core element of teacher's brand identity is his field and specialization, which will affect the type of associations that are desirable and feasible. Attributes directly related to the use of a teacher services, e.g., teaching abilities, fluent speech, relational abilities can provide functional benefits and sometimes emotional benefits for customers. A teacher-related attribute can create a value proposition by offering something extra like features or services, or by offering something better. Uses and users are direct linked by the field/specialization. Country of origin may add an extra-image, some region used to be a source of valuable specialists, e.g. within the USA marketing is "at home".

The brand-as-organization. This perspective focuses on attributes of the educational organization rather than on those of the teacher himself. Such organizational attributes like provider for top professionals, interested in new teaching methods, a drive for quality and concern for the local problems are created by the people, culture, values and programs of the school. Aaker notes that organizational attributes are more enduring and resistant to competitive claims than product attributes [1], rarely a professor image is stronger than a university image.

The brand-as-person. Himself a person, the teacher's brand is perceived as having a unique personality. From this perspective a brand identity is richer and more interesting than a common one based on product attributes.

The brand-as-symbol. A strong symbol like some prestigious title or positions or organizations in the CV or some natural abilities to impress auditorium, can provide cohesion and structure to an identity and make it much easier to gain recognition and recall.

Once the brand identity is developed next step is to set your goal, then focus that message on who the teacher is and what he stand for within the chosen field. Final step is to spread this message through a variety of media channels that are viewed by the targeted "customers": on-line, conferences, mass-media etc.

II. USAGE OF THE E-LEARNING TOOLS FOR A TEACHER'S PERSONAL BRANDING

Spread a teacher's brand into e-learning universe is first of all about on-line branding. We can talk here about Internet -branding (i-branding). From a branding perspective, online communication combines mass media's reach with the personalization inherent in two-way dialogue – previously only possible using personal promotion [16]. An organizational branding strategy include various

communication channels but most affordable for a single person effort, in financial terms, remain the Internet. In fact, the Web page is not just another channel designed to increase visibility and access; it is rapidly becoming the shop window for many players in the information industry [13].
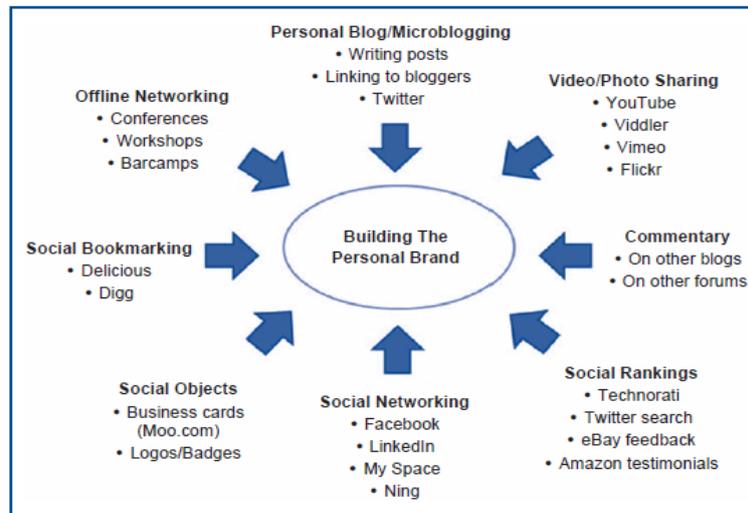

Figure 2 Key tools available today to enhance a personal brand [6]

Entire Web 2.0 is all about connecting people around subjects of mutual interest. So can we discuss about Social Media Marketing – describes the use of social networks for marketing purposes. In some cases, is the interaction of strong brands with their fans and critics as well as networking or interactive marketing known []. Main interest in e-learning environment have:

- *Blogging - t*eacher who's mini-blog/blog is one of the first things that people will visit when they want to learn more about a person her expertise and interest areas over time and what she have to offer. A blog have a stronger asset because blogs rank higher in search engines and lend more to. These portals also need to have a strong core that sends out the right visual message for your teachers brand.
- *Professional networking - a* LinkedIn profile is a combination of a resume, cover letter, references document and a moving and living database of a personal network [14]. It may use it to create own personal advertising, search for jobs, meet new people and build meaningful relationships..
- *Other social network (Twitter, Facebook, Google+)* - due to the high attractiveness for a lot of people, became a strong tool. Social networks are a good place to get feedback and ideas on how the teacher can improve his brand.
- *Sites and Forums*- comments post on this, under real name, can put into the light personal and professional strengths .

People who are active in social media can easily become popular. No matter what kind of Web 2.0 tools we use a particular purpose must be pursued: gaining the trust of target and this is possible by an honest and careful self presentation. This include a good management of Web presence, first of all. Every message or comment posted appear on search engine index and it will be displayed by request.

Summarizing Social Media Marketing can help a teacher achieving the following objectives: building and maintaining a positive brand image (reputation management); increase brand awareness ; improve the number of visitors of the website ; acquisition of "customer" (educational organizations and students); developing his skills: teaching, communicating; extending his PR (personal relation) system.

III. CONCLUSIONS

As an asset, a brand is a symbol of the expected future profits of a teacher; the problem is how to determine the earning power of his brand. The way that the teacher is able to express that relevancy

in a language that educational organizations, students and stakeholders appreciate will determine its success. Once they are aware of the teacher brand, it needs to be relevant to their needs, satisfying and exceeding their expectations. Teacher's brand values need to be identified. The teacher's brand values must be emphasized through strategic advertising. All what a teacher represents professionally must be clearly visible into Web 2.0. This honest and clear communication leads to being differentiated from all others.

According Simmons, Thomas and Truong, given the rise of social networks, blogs and other forms of third-party communications, this will be an increasingly critical strategic issue for marketing managers and researchers in the field [15]. By comparison, we estimate that most valuable results for a personal branding strategy comes by full and correct usage of tools offered by web 2.0.

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