

ADVISORY

MAKING SENSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING: CONNECTING THE DOTS OF SWOT ANALYSIS

by Christina Drouin

There are three main areas that require marketing strategy at your school. The first is the markets you serve or want to serve. The second is the position your school has or wants to have relative to other educational offerings competing for the same students (or donors, for that matter). The third is the marketing mix that presents the bundle of benefits you bring to the marketplace and how you communicate them.

Strategic thinking about marketing connects the dots between two critical data sets: internal strengths and weaknesses of your school and the external opportunities and threats (or risks) it faces in the immediate and near term.

Creating successful marketing strategy requires openness to testing the future sustainability of current school offerings serving current markets while scanning for opportunities to enter new markets and/or innovate new features and benefits to serve current and/or new markets.

Emphasis in adopting a posture of ongoing strategic thinking is placed on surfacing the most important social, technological, economic, environmental, and political impacts on your school's current primary and secondary target markets. This requires an understanding of the geo-demo-psychographic characteristics of your school's families and students (where they come from, what they look like, and what

kind of lifestyle choices they make), an understanding of their needs, wants, expectations, perceptions and satisfactions, and an analysis of how well-equipped your school is to prevail in anticipating and meeting those needs over peer institutions present in the competitive landscape.

This analysis will identify potential strategic marketing opportunities in the areas of markets, institutional positioning, and marketing mix, including potential strategic considerations in the areas of market penetration, market development, product development and diversification.

Asking the Right Questions

Here is a list of essential research questions, not exhaustive but sufficient; identified here by collapsing key external STEEP Factors (social, technological, environmental, economic, and political) that most influence strategic marketing in the areas of markets, institutional positioning and marketing mix, and connecting them to their relevant internal research data points.

1. MARKET STRATEGY

Internal Research – Demographic Relevancies

How would you describe the demographics of your current primary market and secondary markets including age, family size, income, educational

attainment, family of origin attributes, and occupation? Has there been recent growth or decline in any particular area or areas?

Based on internal constituent survey responses, what does your primary target market need/want/expect from your school? To what extent is your school delivering on these features and benefits? From Admission Office data: what about your secondary market e.g., those who visit but do not apply; and those apply but do not enroll?

What is your school's brand promise to its primary market? Based on internal research, is this brand promise likely to be right for the future?

What are the most important needs of your primary market that your school is not currently meeting, but could meet with a change in marketing mix elements? What are the most important needs of your secondary market that your school is not meeting currently, but could meet with a change in marketing mix elements?

Are there any noteworthy trends in attrition when mission appropriate students do not return?

External Research – Demographic Relevancies

Has there been local growth in any of the dominant demographic characteristics of your school's primary or secondary market that would suggest an opportunity to gain market share?

Has there been – or is there projected to be – a decline in any of the demographics of your school's primary and secondary markets that would be a threat to maintaining market share?

What economic issues and trends have had the most negative impact on school revenues in the past three years? What are the forecasts for these issues and trends? What opportunities and threats do these forecasts present?

What if any political factors present opportunities or threats to your school and/or its primary and secondary markets?

Internal Research – Geographic Relevancies

Where do most of your current families live? Where have they lived over the past three years? Has there been any growth or decline in the past three years in

where they are coming from? What about the secondary market?

External Research – Geographic Relevancies

Has there been - or is there projected to be - local growth in any of the primary zip codes you serve? Are there any 'like' or emerging geographic markets that could be an opportunity? For example, zip codes with new housing developments for families in price ranges similar to areas you are drawing from now?

Internal Research – Psychographic Relevancies

What if any lifestyle, leisure, or media preferences and/or habits are distinctive to your primary and secondary markets?

External Research – Psychographic Relevancies

Are there lifestyle trends that your school could leverage to increase brand awareness, preference, and loyalty? Media and mobile platform preferences?

Are there groups of prospective families who can afford your school's tuition, have school-aged children, and place a value on private school education that should be targeted based on demographic, geographic or psychographic changes in the marketplace?

2. INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONING STRATEGY

Internal Research Relevancies

What are your school's core competencies and its current competitive position? In other words, what is your school most known for that is unique and valued among its target market segments? Based on the institutional mission, vision and goals, is this the position your school wants? If so, going forward, what adjustments if any in might be indicated to ensure that your school prevails in defending this position?

External Research Relevancies

With which peer schools does your school compete most strongly for the same students? What is your understanding of each one's brand attributes and competitive position? What opportunities and threats does each player present?



How do your school's core competencies compare with those of its top competitors for students in each division? On what bases does your school compete for students (educational product features and benefits, price and pricing offers, prestige, convenience, level of service, relationships)? In other words, why would a candidate to whom you would offer an enrollment contract choose another school over your school?

3. MARKETING MIX STRATEGY

Internal Research Relevancies

What are our key strategies and tactics in the areas of product, price, place and promotion?

External Research Relevancies

What are the strategies of our top competitors in the areas of product, price, place and promotion? *Based on a scan of your school's competitors' educational offerings*, how does your school stack up? Are adjustments suggested to be more competitive in the current markets it serves or potential new markets?

Based on a scan of your school's competitors' pricing strategies, how does your school's pricing strategy compare? Are adjustments suggested to be more competitive in the current markets you serve or potential new markets?

Based on a scan of your school's competitors' 'place' (delivery system for the curriculum and other offerings), how does your school compare? Are adjustments suggested that would make your school more competitive in the current markets it serves or potential new markets?

Based on a scan of your school's marketing communications materials and events calendar, how does your school's promotion strategy compete with those of key competitors?

Taking Action: The Language of Strategy

Here are 50 active verbs that describe a broad range of strategic activities that will change and improve your school's strategic thinking in the critically important areas of markets, institutional positioning, and marketing mix.

1. Position
2. Reposition
3. Brand
4. Rebrand
5. Compete
6. Offer new
7. Produce more
8. Invent
9. Enhance quality of
10. Retrench
11. Coordinate
12. Partner
13. Increase
14. Decrease
15. Start
16. Stop
17. Innovate
18. Acquire
19. Make aware
20. Publicize
21. Integrate
22. Maximize
23. Promote
24. Advertise
25. Educate
26. Target
27. Diversify
28. Persuade
29. Expand
30. Divest
31. Improve
32. Centralize
33. Relocate
34. Build
35. Reconfigure
36. Decentralize
37. Maintain
38. Fund new
39. Reduce
40. Discount
41. Synchronize
42. Optimize
43. Integrate online
44. Launch
45. Penetrate
46. Research
47. Develop
48. Disseminate
49. Analyze
50. Manage

