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Integrated Marketing Communications in Building Customer Relationship of Training Organizations

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บทคัดย่อ

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ABSTRACT

Integrated marketing communication helps organizations to communicate to consumers about how they differ from their competitors. An organization can present its outstanding qualities through various marketing communication tools in the same direction and consistently, which help them reach their target group. In turn, the consumers will become familiar and confident with the organization, and have the kind of behavior desired by the organization. Training organizations of government units, private companies, and educational institutes have been using integrated marketing communication to build relationship with customers. Most widely-used communication methods are: public relations, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct marketing.

Keywords: Integrated Marketing Communications, Training Organization, Customer Relationship, Customer Loyalty

Introduction

Communication is the foundation of human communication and is an important tool of social process. Human beings rely on communication as a tool to accomplish the purposes of their activities and to live peaceably with others. Also, communication leads to changes of knowledge, attitude, and behaviors of human. As for business organizations, they need to communicate in order to create customer relationship by using various strategies in order to give more attention to their customers, ensuring that the customers feel that they are important in the eyes of the organization. This will make the customers feel engaged and loyal toward the organization and do not want to be customers of other organizations.

The National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 11 and The Skill Development Promotion Act (2002)

Organizations need to adapt themselves to cope with the changes in the development of information technology, channel power and inverse in competition. Also, customer's need is one of the key factors that drive the organization unable to produce goods or services

according to their target but they have to produce goods and services to meet the needs of consumers instead (Hammer and Champy, 1993). The National Economic and Social Development plan No. 11 (2012-2016) is a continuing concept of National economic and social development plans National No.8-11. It concentrates on the philosophy of sufficiency economy and people-centered development. It aims to create learning, reading and curiosity habit to Thai people. As well as promoting mutual learning for people in different ages, together with encouraging community groups, organizations and individuals to learn creatively through all medias in a language that easy to understand. Including the promotion of alternative education that meets the needs of learners. It creates a society of quality learning with supporting the factor that contributes to lifelong learning (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2011). In addition, The Skill development promotions act (2002). In addition, Skill development promotion act (2002) that effective up to now mentioned that it intends to encourage and support private sector establishments with 100 or more employees to be involved in the development of skilled labor even more. Persuading private sector establishments by the tax exemption and reduction as well as providing and improving benefits in various fields. Employers have to provide more efficient training to the workers. employers, human resources departments and concerned parties should take into account for the guidelines and set rules to be appropriated with Skill development promotion act (2002) for the most efficient result of both employer and employee. The Penalties in the event that the establishments or entrepreneurs fail to comply with Skill development promotion act (2002) will be fine of 3,990 baht per person to the fund for skill development. (Department of Skill Development, 2002).

As a result from The National Economic and Social Development plan No. 11 and Skill development promotion act (2002), organizations focus more on training labor skill. As it can improve quality of labor also has side benefit for tax exemption. Furthermore, establishments or entrepreneurs shall pay a fine in accordance with the law if they fail to comply with skill development promotion act (2002).

Form and Process of Training According to Abella

Abella (1989) says that developing a training program is like setting up a theatre or a performance. Whether it will turn out impressive or fascinating in the eyes of the audience depends on the preparation, design, and support from many divisions, curtain decorators included. Therefore, the very important things that will make a training program effective are the development of the program itself and the readiness of preparation. These will lead to the

step that the program is put into practice and evaluated. In the stage of preparation for the development of a program, Abella sets up a 10-step procedure. This concept begins from drafting the program, which requires the consideration of training needs as the first thing. Then suitable strategies will be established for the conducting of training and other steps toward the end of the program.

The details of each step specified in training programs by Abella are as follows:

- Step 1: Gathering information on training needs
- Step 2: Preparing the program specifications documents
- Step 3: Conducting the design meeting
- Step 4: Preparing the design document
- Step 5: Preparing the materials list and project plan
- Step 6: Gathering information for program materials
- Step 7: Writing materials
- Step 8: Conducting the materials test
- Step 9: Testing the materials test
- Step 10: Holding the pilot program, as shown in figure 1

After the steps in program development has been established, we also need to specify the appropriate training strategies, curriculum, method of training, innovation and technology. When we are confident that the developed project is well-prepared and can really be conducted, then the next step is implementing, evaluation and follow-up.

The purpose of training leads organizations design various training courses, workshops, with the similar curriculum for example, leadership development program, teamwork program, risk management program, negotiating skill program, professional speaker/lecturer program and preparation for Asean Economic Community program. This makes training organizations faced with many competitors in the market. Besides, some companies do not want to invest in what they cannot see an exact profit due to economic downturn. From such an impact, training organizations have to use various communication strategies in order to gain back competitive advantages. The aim is to satisfy customers and build loyalty to their products or services.

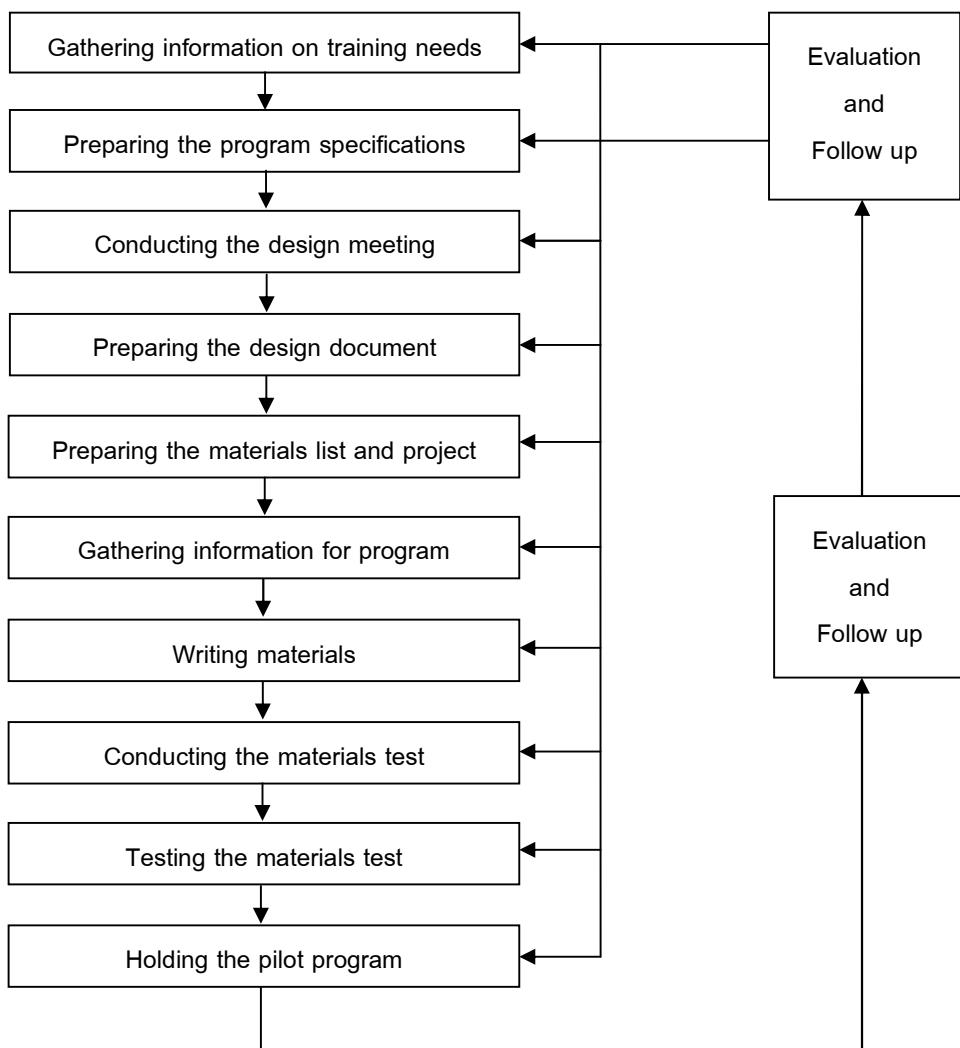


Figure 1: Form and Process of Training According to Abella

Source: Abella, 1989

Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated marketing communication helps organizations to communicate about what differentiate them from their competitors and enhance positioning of their products in the market. Organizations need to make consumers feel that they are better than their competitors and let them know the level of their products. Integrated marketing communication can be the solution to both. It helps organizations to present its positive features through the use of various tools in the same direction. Using this kind of communication helps organizations to

access their targeted customers and get the customers to perceive the message that the organizations wish to communicate.

Schultz *et al.*(1995), an expert in integrated marketing communication at Northwestern University, has developed its definition as “the process that business strategy uses to plan, develop, use and evaluate brand communication program, which is collaborative, measurable, and motivating to consumers, customers, prospect customers, employees, and other related persons in and outside the organization for a period of time.” Its goal is to produce returns in the form of money and to build the brand and value for shareholders in the long term.

Integrated marketing communication requires a clear plan. An effective IMC campaign must have 2 essential characteristics: campaign continuity and interrelation between messages communicated through various types of media. It must have physical and psychological factors that are related. Physical continuity is using creativity in all marketing communications in the same direction in order to make integrated marketing successful. Slogans, sayings, and other features in communication must be similar or the same. Psychological continuity means attitude of consumers toward the organization and the brand, which should create positive feeling toward the products or services of the organization. This can be done by using images and tone in integrated marketing communication in the same direction, making consumers have the same feeling toward products or services in the same way, although they may perceive the message through different types of marketing tools.

Another characteristic of integrated marketing communication is strategic orientation. Successful IMC plans are ones that achieve the goal of the business strategy established by the organization. It is not just a plan that seems creative, attractive and makes people laugh. It must focuses on the strategies of the organization. The main goals for most organizations are making sales, increasing market shares and producing profit for the organization. Therefore, the message communicated to the consumers must be designed to achieve such goals. Marketing tools must be selected specifically to achieve the objectives of the strategies. These are what make a successful plan (Sirgy, 1998).

Haytko (1996) said that the principles for successful integrated marketing communication strategies include: (1) Combine different approaches of various marketing communication tools, (2) Make sure that communications are similar and can be interpreted in the same way by the people inside and outside the organization, and (3) Achieve the objectives of IMC plan. Furthermore, Schultz *et al.* (1994) also added some important things for creating IMC plan. First, all integrations must start at the executive level of the organization since the executives have full authority to build opportunities that will lead marketing communication toward success. Second, organizations should give significance to the feeling

of consumers or prospects more than the organization itself. Third, in establishing the objectives, it is important to include both market part and communication part, and ensure that communication will lead to marketing activities. Finally, the effectiveness of IMC plan can be measured by using the concept of the return on investment (ROI) particularly the financial results.

Procedures of Planning Integrated Marketing Communication

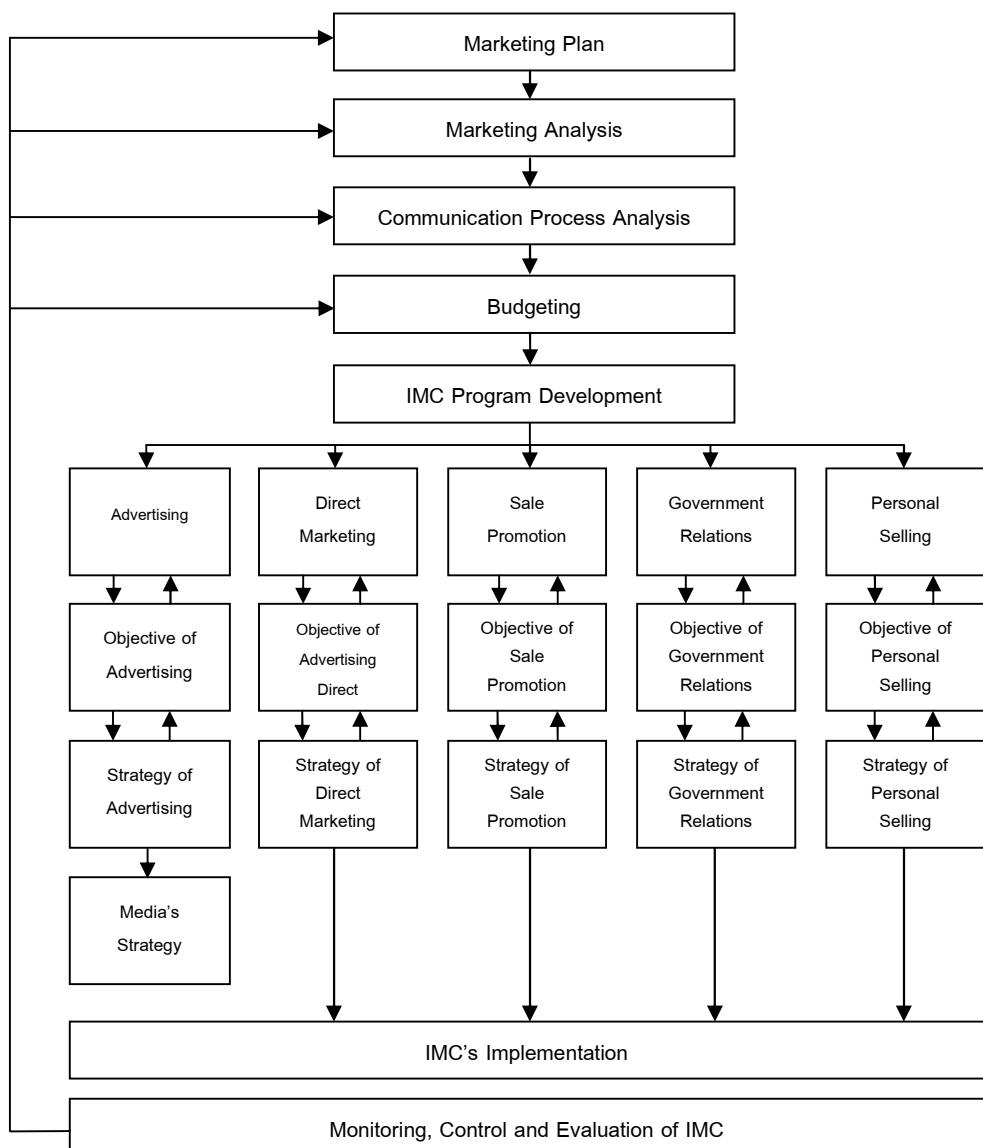


Figure 2 : Steps of planning integrated marketing communication

Source: Magrath, 1993.

Magrath (1993) has presented the concept for planning integrated marketing communications as shown in figure 2 into 6 steps, as follows:

1. Setting Marketing Objective Organizations can prepare executive summary by presenting brief important information about current situation of the company to the executives so they may consider them while setting the main objectives of the organization each year; in consequence, each division or department can produce their own objectives that are in line with the main ones. The main objectives of the organization are marketing objectives or statements that are part of the main marketing plan, with achievement measurable in a period of time such as sales, market shares, and profit or returns of investment. Good marketing objectives must state the number used in measuring success, state a specific period of time, practical and achievable in reality.

The setting of sale-oriented objectives is the setting of marketing promotion objectives that can be measured by the amount of sales. The changes in the amount of sales indicate whether the investment spent in advertisement and marketing promotion has achieved its target. The advantage in setting objectives by the amount of sales is the easiness in measuring the success, but the disadvantage is that when the amount of sales is lower, it could be a result of other factors apart from ineffective promotion plan such as the changes in economic circumstance, ineffective marketing mix (wrong planning in products, prices, distribution channel, taking too long before finding out the results from marketing promotion plan, etc.)

2. Situation Analysis This step is the analyzing of elements and significant current situation of the products or services, which helps determine the overall communication objectives of the organization. Three sets of important information are used during this step.

2.1 The analysis of products or services can be done by focusing on what benefits the consumers directly receive from them. Product distribution should be considered as well, and that means thorough marketing survey is required. Also, there should be an analysis to find out what causes the problem with the products or the services, in order to solve the problem correctly and directly.

2.2 Consumer analysis can be done by studying target market since it is necessary for organizations to have access to such market. Details to be studied include geological factors, demographic factors, psychological factors and life style. The size of the market should also be considered. The organization needs to find out how much of the market share comes from this group, their pattern of product using and their attitude toward the products of the

organization. The more organization can find such information, the easier the planning and communication objective setting process will be. It will relate more directly to the problem of the organization as well.

2.3 Evaluating competitor can be done by first knowing who the main competitors are and what strategies they are currently using. The more the organization knows its competitor, the more chance that their plan will achieve its goals. Therefore, the organization must search for all information and data about every aspect of its competitors, including weaknesses, marketing budget, sales amount, etc. Such information will be used to create advantages in setting marketing objectives and strategies in the future.

3. Setting Communication Objectives This step gives importance to the statement in marketing communication plan. It is the communication of the right statement to the target group. Marketing manager must transfer the statements that are in marketing objectives to communication objectives and specific promotion objectives correctly and completely. The main things to be considered in such transference are:

- 3.1 Target audience must relate to market segment of the organization
- 3.2 Main features, advantages, benefits of the product, as well as instruction on how to use the product
- 3.3 Information about the brand of the organization and its competitors such as sales amount, market share, competitive strategies and expense in marketing

3.4 Principles used in positioning the product, behavior of consumers, which may lead to consumers trying the product for the first time, repeating the purchase, changing brand or increasing their use of such product

Although full-cycle marketing plan is not the same as setting marketing objectives, it still relies on marketing data as the foundation. Setting marketing objectives focuses on the objectives of the products and the organization, while setting communication objectives focuses on the form of communication. What needs to be done is designing each communication task to support the overall communication objective. Marketing communication objectives can be planned for short term (1 year) and long term (3-5 years).

4. Setting Budget Since most executives do not like to spend money on high expenses, the best time to make a proposal for the budget that will be used to cover the expenses occurred while putting the plan to work should be after the setting of marketing objectives and marketing mix. The budget should be established for all communication

channels or sales promotion activities, such as personal selling, advertisement, promotion, and public relation.

The budget for advertisement is often established by categorizing the ones that have the strongest impact on sales amount. The most popular methods are marginal analysis and sales response model. The concept of marginal analysis is that when the advertisement expenses increase, sales and gross profit also increase, but after a period of time it will go down. Net profit comes from gross profit deducted by advertisement expenses. The basic principles of marginal analysis are:

- Increase advertisement budget if the rising of the expenses are lower than the rising of the income
- Reduce advertisement budget if the rising in the expenses are higher than the rising of the income.
- Maintain the same budget if the rising of the expenses are equal to the rising of the income.

Nevertheless, Marginal Analysis Model is not a very popular method for establishing advertisement budget. This is because there is an argument against the idea that sales amount is the main objective of advertisement and promotion: the main objective of advertisement and promotion can be perception and attitude of consumers which can later have impact on the sales amount. There is also an argument against the idea that sales amount is the result of advertisement and promotion only, because sales amount can result from other elements in the marketing mix such as product, price, and distribution channel.

5. Development of Integrated Marketing Communication Program In this step, the organization must establish media objectives in order to see the overall picture of the activities used in advertisement during the period that the plan is used. In addition, the media used in advertisement must be identified if they are primary media or secondary media. The details and time period that each media is used must be specified as well. The development of integrated marketing communication requires combining all the media used by the organization, including advertisement, direct marketing, public relation and personal selling. The purpose of using each type of media must move toward the same direction and go in line with the main communication objectives. To develop a full-cycle marketing communication program, one must start with making advertisement plan from general point to specific point. This will help presenting a clear picture of how advertisement can solve the problems of the

product or service. Therefore, making advertisement plan is a complicated task that consists of 5 main points, as follows:

1. Target Market: It is necessary to specify target consumer group of the product or service and know how many of them are there. Also, one needs to specify physical and psychological aspect of the consumer group, their behavior in purchasing and using products, especially their behavior in receiving advertisement media. All of this information will be used in establishing advertisement plan.

2. Advertising Communication Objectives: These are the main objectives or goals that the organization wishes to achieve through advertisement. They are written in simple language, clear and easy to understand. Most importantly, they can be used to measure the increasing, the decreasing and the changes of perception, satisfaction and trust of consumers that are affected by the advertisement.

3. Creative Strategy: This is very important because if the organization uses wrong or inappropriate creative strategy, it will waste time and budget spent in producing the advertisement. The information needed consists of:

3.1 *Product or Service*- studies the actual characteristics of the product such as what it is made from, how it is produced and if there is any special ingredient.

3.2 *Consumer*- find information about all aspects of consumers such as physical characteristics, geographical details, psychological condition, and behavior related to reception of advertisement. If the advertiser understands consumers, the plan is already half-way successful.

3.3 *Competition*- study direct and indirect competitors to find out which organizations they are, what brand their product is, and how they use advertisement to reach the target group.

3.4 *Competitive Consumer Benefit*- what benefit your rivals communicate to consumers and if there is advantage or disadvantage when it is compared to your product. This will be used as the information to create advertising message to persuade consumers to switch to the organization's brand. Simple technique in creating advertisement is looking at the consumer's point of view, instead of advertiser's or marketer's point of view.

4. The Support for the Benefit: It is necessary to find supporting reasons about the benefits that consumers will get from the product. The basic principle is trying to find such reasons from the actual features of product or service, such as lighter, more volume, consisting of special ingredient, etc. This will help the consumers see how the product differs from others in the market.

5. Target Market Incentive Statement: There are many techniques to write the statement. The basic principle is that it must be communicate to the marketing target group by using the brand and benefits of the product/service that target customers or clients will receive. The statement must shows clearly why they should purchase the product or service.

6. Evaluation It is determining how and when the evaluation of marketing communication plan will be conducted. If an evaluation needs to be done before the project start, it must be specified in evaluation plan, which should include the method of evaluation that will be used. All of this information must be summarized with clear supporting reasons. If the evaluation does not produce results that are expected in the objectives, the organization should find the cause of the problem in order to solve the problem. It can occur from setting inappropriate marketing objectives or communication objectives, and inaccurate current situation analysis or budget setting.

Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy for Customers Relationship of Training Institutions

Integrated Marketing Communications is an important strategy that most organizations use in building relationship with customers. This is because it is a strategy that gives importance to consumers and it is also a process that can be used to manage relationship with customers, which will lead to brand equity. It is a process that all related units are working together to strengthen and promote relationship that is beneficial to customers and stakeholders. All communications toward the target group are controlled to ensure that they are effective and consistent (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998).

Executives of training organizations have given their opinions about integrated marketing communication that their organizations use in communicating to the trainees. They have been using five forms of communication, which are: public relations, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and direct marketing. Training organizations of private companies and educational institutes focus on all five forms of communication, while training organizations of government units mainly focus on public relations.

Integrated marketing communication for building customer relationship in training organizations of public, private, and educational institutes consists of:

1. Public Relations It is a way to build credibility and publicity of an organization, and show its vision about organizational quality. Training organizations use integrated marketing communication in the form of public relations, which include publicizing information through different types of media and websites of the organization, periodically adding new content that are beneficial to those who are interested, updating the website regularly (Thaweewan Kamolbut, 2015) and presenting the content of the course, lecturers, venue, pictures of activities, and list of training institutes that use to give their training services in order to increase credibility of the organization (Suwaree Thiangthat, 2015).

2. Advertising It is communicating news and information through different channels. The advertiser must pay for the space or air-time used in sending such information. They use media types that are rather low-cost such as advertising through keywords in search engine (www.google.com), the most popular search engine that people use in seeking information. This is to make the public learn more about the training organization. (Pakorn Wongratanapibul, 2015). The keywords used in advertising is usually related to the organization or the training course, for example, training, training service, free training, computer training, management training, etc. (Suwaree Thiangthat, 2015).

3. Personal Selling It is using representatives of one's organization to meet face-to-face with one or more consumers to offer products or services, answer questions, and take purchase orders. Training organizations use marketing communication in the form of personal selling to search for customers, meet customers, and make proposal and training contracts. Sale persons receive compensation as agreed with the organization (Wullop Yaiying, 2015). Personal selling is the main strategy of training organization in private and educational institutes because it is convenient to change or adjust the topic of training according to the request of customers (Pariya Rinrattanakorn, 2015).

4. Sales Promotion It is an activity to increase sales and add value to the products for a short period of time. Training organizations set up price promotion by reducing the cost of training service. For example, the costs of training on Saturdays are discounted from 5,000 Baht to 999 Baht so that university students can participate. There can be free products or free courses such as buy 1 course get 2 courses. (Thaweewan Kamolbut, 2015). Customers who make payment within due date receive 5% discount (Suwaree Thiangthat, 2015) and there are some courses offered for free. (Thanawut Naiyakowit, 2015). The method of promotion

depends on the type of training, the number of courses, the number of participants, and the period of training.

5. Direct Marketing It is a form of marketing directed from the organization to the target group in order to invoke a particular response in purchase decision. The result of this kind of communication is measurable. Training organizations conduct direct marketing by sending e-mail to addresses in existing customer database (Pakorn Wongratanaipibul, 2015), sending letters or making phone calls to target customers (Suwaree Thiangthat, 2015). Using email is more effective than letter or phone call because the receiver can open the mail right away. However, sending e-mails to customers must be done appropriately and directed to the target group only in order to avoid annoying receivers.

Government training organizations focus on integrated marketing communication in the form of public relations because most courses are free of charge or low-cost (Somboon Nukaew, 2015). They also communicate by advertising through different types of media such as radio and television. The budget used for this comes from the ministry that they belong to. There are also some sales promotion such as discounted courses and free courses (Thanawut Naiyakowit, 2015). However, sales promotion depends on the year that the training takes place and the number of times the training has been conducted. In addition, there is integrated marketing communication in the form of direct marketing by sending letters and emails to the target group of participants.

Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy for Attracting New Customers of Training Organizations

Building customer relationship is a way to create, find, and keep all kinds of customers that can bring profit to the organization by designing strategies to attract new customers and to make transaction, which are the main activities in retaining existing customers and making profit from them in a long term. The executives of training organizations revealed that their organizations use integrated marketing communication to attract new customers in the following ways:

1. Coordinate with directly-responsible departments by contacting officers or personnel who are responsible in arranging training for organizations in order to select employees suitable to participate in each training program, enabling decision-making process of customers to go smoothly and quickly. (Somboon Nukaew, 2015).

2. Communicate about the quality of the program to customers. Since most customers want to use the service of organizations that arrange trainings of good quality, it is necessary to communicate to them that the organization offers the form of training that takes good care of trainees, allows them to share their opinions, and follow-ups after the program is over. These will create good attitude toward the training organization (Thaweewan Kamolbut, 2015).

3. Communicate thoroughly, inclusively and completely. The organization contacts Human Resource Department, communicates to their current and new customers, and create a variety of programs to meet the needs of customers (Pakorn Wongratanapibul, 2015).

4. Focus on direct marketing by using staff or personnel responsible in training programs to find new customers and give them financial remuneration for market share (Wullop Yaiying, 2015).

5. Create interesting names for training programs. Use communicating strategy that makes the program look attractive to customers. For example, organizations might communicate that they are gurus or experts by creating names such as "Seven Marketing Communication Strategies Expert Marketers Must Know" (Pariya Rinrattanakorn, 2015).

6. Build relationship with customers by listening to their problems and design training programs to specifically answer their needs. Sometimes adjusting some topics or subjects is enough to create a customized training program for each organization (Pariya Rinrattanakorn, 2015).

Strategies for Building Loyalty for Customers of Training Organizations

Grönroos (2000) stated that loyalty means willingness of customers to support or give benefits to an organization in a long run. They re-purchase or continuously purchase products or services of the organization, and recommend the organization to others. These things can happen on the basis that these customers admire one particular organization more than other organizations. Therefore, loyalty does not only mean behaviors of customers that reflect loyalty, but also include positive feelings of customers toward the organization, such as admiration, affection or willingness. Loyalty will endure as long as customers feel that they receive value from that particular organization more than from other organizations.

Executives of training organizations said that the techniques in building loyalty that training organizations use are:

1. Training organizations place much emphasis on the quality of training programs, ensuring that trainees will be able to apply what they learn in the programs to their real working life (Thanawut Naiyakowit, 2015). They also point to quality guarantee or awards that they have received (Wullop Yaiying, 2015) which helps trainees to have more confidence and loyalty, and they may return to take more courses with the same organization.

2. Allow the trainees to have participation during the training program. Most of training organizations arrange programs in the form of workshop. Trainees are separated into small groups (Wullop Yaiying, 2015) and they are given ice-breaking activities to get familiar with one another (Thanawut Naiyakowit, 2015). This helps creating the network of trainees (Pairoj Sapakit, 2015) and leads to loyalty. The trainees will regularly come to training with the organization and persuade others whom they used to know during past trainings to join them in the new programs (Thanawut Naiyakowit, 2015).

3. Give benefits to the trainees more than they expect will make them feel that the program is impressive and worth their money. They will have more loyalty because they receive other benefits from the program more than they expected (Thaweewan Kamolbut, 2015).

4. Keep in touch and coordinate with the customers regularly. Companies that are customers of training organizations are updated about each process in the program (Wullop Yaiying, 2015). Training organizations regularly keep in touch and interact with their customers, which results in customers wanting to use more of their services (Pariya Rinrattanakorn, 2015).

5. Follow up after the program is finished. Training organizations design activities to follow up the results of training. This makes customers feel that the organization takes care of them continuously (Pakorn Wongratanapibul, 2015).

6. Arrange activities that allow trainees to meet up after a training program is over. Training organization might arrange something like a homecoming party for those who have graduated from the program to meet up and socialize with one another (Pairoj Sapakit, 2015).

7. Send gifts or meet customers during important festivals. Training organizations send their gifts, such as gift basket and cordial card, to their customers during festivals to maintain good relationship with them (Wullop Yaiying, 2015).

Loyalty that customers have toward training organizations are positive attitude that they have toward the quality of the program, the quality of the organization, coordination, opportunities to express their opinions, and follow-up activities after a course is finished.

Customers learn that the training organization is able to respond to their needs so they feel committed to use the service of the same organization for the long run.

Conclusion

Integrated marketing communication plays an important role for training organizations in the way that they help the organizations build good relationship with customers. Training organizations in private businesses and educational institutes use this kind of communication to build good rapport with their customers. Examples are public relation, advertising, direct marketing, personal selling and sales promotion. As for public or government training organizations, they focus on public relation and advertising through low-cost media.

This is because their programs are mostly free of charge. In addition, training organizations use strategies to attract customers by coordinating with those who responsible in training arrangement, creating program names that are interesting, and designing training programs that match the needs of customers. They also try to maintain customer's loyalty toward their organizations.

This step might seem like the end goal but in reality it is just a stop before returning to the selling step. Only having a large number of training programs and the growth of organization is not enough to consider that a training organization is successful. What is also needed is customer's loyalty. Therefore, training organizations need to use integrated marketing communication to effectively build relationship with customers in order to ensure that in the future their customers will not hesitate to use the service of the organizations again.

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