

Educational Marketing:
A New Strategy for Building Customer Loyalty



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Educating customers about products and services has long been a priority for leading companies. But new Internet-based approaches now enable them to develop far deeper customer relationships through ongoing education and information sharing. You can too by applying our five critical success factors to your marketing challenge.

It's no secret that the age-old maxim about educated consumers being the best customers has taken on new significance in the Internet era. Advanced communications technologies now make it possible for companies to interact directly with their clients, distributors, channel partners and other important stakeholders in ways never dreamed possible until quite recently.

Leading companies are maximizing those opportunities with a variety of approaches to support their business objectives. Instead of focusing solely on product-related information, they pursue communication and learning strategies that emphasize flexibility, interactivity and understanding with a fundamental focus on enabling customer success. Educational content is often packaged for consumption via the Internet or mobile devices to win the favor of busy clients who are deluged with information.

For example, outdoor adventure retailer REI provides expert advice with articles, videos, and gear checklists, which meet customer needs while encouraging product purchases. In the financial services field, State Street Global Advisors' highly usable learning portal, created with the assistance of Intrepid Learning Solutions, provides educational resources to investment professionals. And in the IT profession, accounting software maker Intuit, Inc. offers extensive learning and networking opportunities to serve its vibrant communities of small businesses and consumers, seamlessly integrating product suggestions with education.

The impact of such educational marketing programs translates directly to the bottom line. Research shows that customers who engage with a company's educational marketing offerings are 29 times more likely to purchase a company's product than those who are informed through media ads alone, and 5 times more likely to make a purchase than those reached by direct marketing. They are also 94 percent more satisfied with their purchase and 93 percent more likely to tell friends about their experience.¹

Online educational experiences make customers 29 times more likely to buy than media advertising.

A properly developed and executed educational marketing initiative is the antithesis of a hard-sell marketing campaign. It is a highly professional educational program dedicated to keeping valued clients informed about important issues and trends related to their interests. Its singular purpose is to help customers achieve success with their objectives and pursuits—not to push products and services. Effective educational marketing applies best practices of adult learning theory to ensure that customer engagement and success.

¹Harvey, Bill. Consumer Education Produced High ROI. Next Century Media. 2006.

At the same time, educational marketing achieves measurable business objectives to satisfy the most skeptical executives driven seeks clear, quantifiable results. It builds trust, loyalty and credibility with customers, which directly translates to increased customer retention and higher revenues. Educational marketing programs that are well executed also cut through the din of today's incessant drumbeat of low-value, high-volume marketing "noise," and credibly position companies with the coveted status of "trusted advisor."

Other marketing goals achieved through online customer education include a reduction in the high costs of product support, training and administration. Also, it is a cost-effective way to reach a customer base that increasingly ignores print publications. Finally, smart companies know that if they don't provide the timely, relevant and useful information that their customers and prospects are seeking, their competitors surely will.

Key Considerations for Educational Marketing: Five Pillars for Success

How can companies ensure the success of their educational marketing programs? Through our client experience and independent research on the topic, Intrepid Learning Solutions has defined five critical success factors to help organizations achieve success with their web-based educational marketing activities:



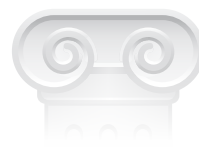
MAKE IT EASY.



MAKE IT RELEVANT.



MAKE IT FRESH.



MANAGE IT.



MEASURE IT.



Make It Easy.

The centerpiece of any successful program is an interactive website designed specifically for the targeted audience the company is seeking to reach. The website's sophistication mirrors the organization's training and communications needs and budget. But regardless of those factors, the site must have the appearance and usability of polished consumer websites that users are accustomed to visiting. It must cater to the needs of time-starved professionals to find and process information quickly. For example, you might need to provide content in courseware formats suitable for individuals at their PC who may have five minutes for a quick overview, as well as bite-sized nuggets of strategic information on their mobile phones or PDAs.

**Make It Relevant.**

A successful educational marketing solution also must include topics and formats that are customer-driven, covering not just how to use specific products, but also related topics that help customers achieve their fundamental goals and objectives that are driving them to consider your products and services. Savvy customers expect more to win their trust. For example, imagine that your company manufactures and sells high quality, ultra-efficient windows. To build an intimate customer relationship and firmly establish your brand, you would want to offer more than product specifications and energy efficiency data—those elements are a given. You might want to offer a learning guide educating homeowners on how they can conduct an energy efficiency audit of their home. You might want to provide details on federal income tax incentives, and case examples of the best ways to maximize your credit. Or you might want to develop a design simulator that lets homeowners and professional designers envision what your products might look like and what efficiencies they might achieve with them.

Make It Fresh.

People tend to lose interest in web sites that don't provide a compelling reason for them to return. Companies need to post fresh educational content on a regular basis just as they do with other types of content, and be bold about retiring content that users rate lower or don't access frequently. Customers should be invited to subscribe to content alerts by e-mail or RSS (being careful not to cross the SPAM line).

Manage It.

Behind the scenes, an effective educational marketing website needs to capture critical customer information, such as what content your customers are viewing, how content preferences differ by type of learner, where and why customers might "bail" from your site. After capturing this type of usage data, you can then strategize new content and site improvements. More importantly, you can provide critical data regarding customer and prospect preferences to your colleagues in product development, sales and marketing functions. Users see a marketing-quality site, but the powerful database driving it feeds invaluable data customer information systems. It can also automate the way content is managed, providing alerts for content that needs to be updated or retired.

Measure It.

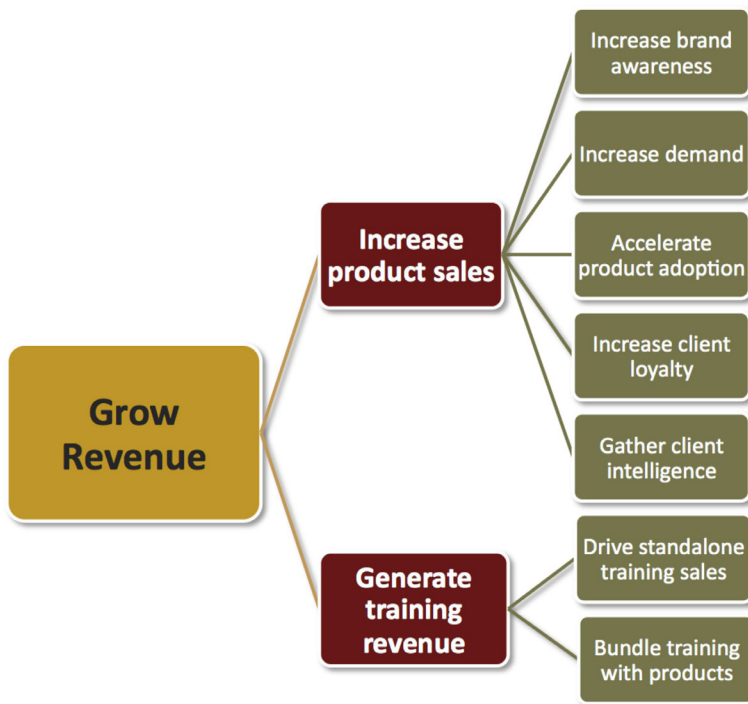
Scorecards and dashboards make it easy for decision makers to see the impact of educational marketing. As noted above, an educational marketing website can provide rich data that can provide keen insights to your customers' and prospects' interests and behaviors. Website analytics and content consumption data enable marketers to see the impact of customer education on product sales and gain macro-level information to focus marketing campaigns.

Getting Started with Educational Marketing

So you think an educational marketing strategy might be right for you. How should you get started?

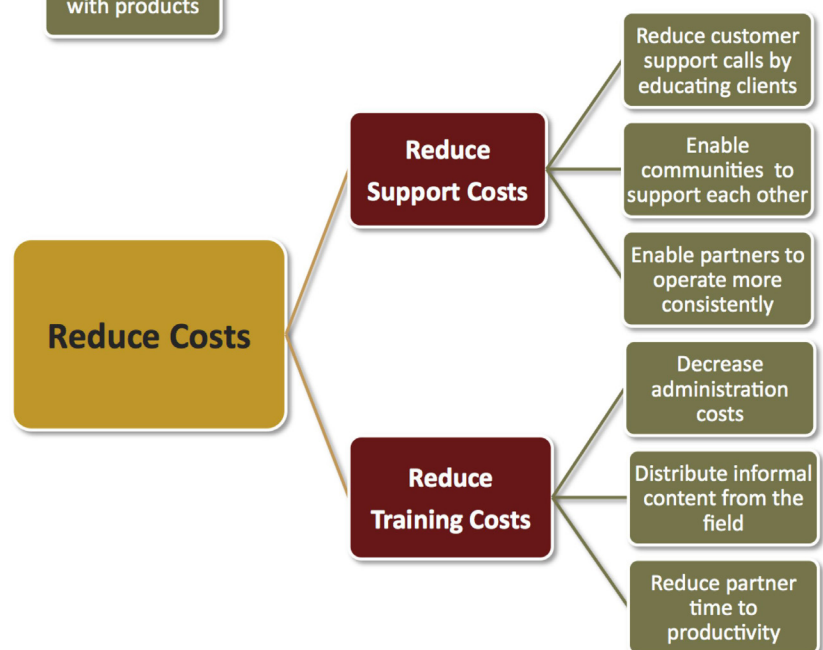
First, articulate your goals and the drivers for them.

Most companies utilize educational marketing solutions to drive top-line growth by building brand awareness and loyalty, attracting new customers, growing existing customer wallet-share, educating channel partners, etc. Yet some organizations, while seeking growth, are also looking to reduce customer acquisition costs, or to reduce costs associated with customer support and education. Whatever your drivers are, it's important to make them explicit. We recommend mapping your goals and drivers. As an example, see the following figures:



Most companies utilize educational marketing solutions to drive top-line growth.

Some organizations, while seeking growth, are also looking to reduce costs.



**Second, do your homework.**

Understanding your customers' needs, behaviors, work environment, learning preferences and more is fundamental to developing a compelling educational marketing solution. You need to know who your customers are, how they are segmented, how they make buying decisions and what information and learning opportunities they are seeking that you can provide. In addition, you will need to understand your competitive market space. What are your competitors up to? How are they positioning and branding themselves? Are they employing an educational marketing strategy? If so, is their strategy effective? How can you differentiate from your competitors in a way that reinforces your brand message?

Third, develop a detailed plan that will enable you to execute.

The elements of strategic alignment noted above are critical, and it is just as important to get the details right. You will need to select, configure, and integrate the right technologies. You will need to develop a content plan that considers topics, modalities, learner preferences and paths, user-generated content approaches, release schedules, and more. Other critical elements include system support and administration, measurement and analytics, marketing your solution, and stakeholder governance.

How Intrepid Can Help

While this can be a lot to consider, with the right help you can shorten your time to impact and achieve your particular goals related to customer education more quickly. Intrepid Learning Solutions specializes in helping clients develop holistic educational marketing and customer education strategies, and executing these strategies as a trusted operational partner. Our specific services and solutions include the following:

- Developing an education-based marketing strategy that inspires product adoption, customer loyalty and brand evangelism.
- Powering your solution with our Agile Learning Portal. Our portal is ideally suited to serve as the informal learning platform for your solution. It combines an elegant user experience with powerful back-end analytics and administrative tools.
- Delivering the optimal customer experience with the help of qualified writers, instructional designers and media producers with marketing experience and usability expertise.
- Establishing the right metrics and assessing the impact of education-based marketing on the business with scorecards and dashboards.
- Partnering with you to manage your entire effort--from strategy and content to delivery and measurement--or handling selectively outsourced components so you can leverage your internal resources for others.



Build Your Competitive Advantage Now

Educational marketing can provide your organization with a compelling advantage over your competitors. You can create loyal customers who will become champions of your brand. Most importantly, in an age of instant access to information, customers expect more from product and service providers. Twentieth century approaches to direct marketing and advertising aren't sufficient in the digital age. Today's customers will turn to sources they can trust who will help them solve their core challenges—not just those who simply promote the latest widget. Go to the next level and become a trusted advisor: build a tighter relationship with your customers by educating them and helping them achieve their goals.

About Intrepid Learning Solutions

Intrepid Learning Solutions is a trusted provider of technology-enabled learning solutions that improve business productivity. Since 1999, we have advised senior learning, marketing and sales executives on how to design, deliver and measure the effectiveness of their education and training programs.

Because learners' needs are multi-faceted, we believe learning should be too. That means delivering the right information, in the right format, at the right time. Intrepid can help you harness new technologies to deliver award-winning learning solutions across multiple platforms — from the classroom to the Web to mobile devices.

But technology is just one enabler of success. That's why our consultants combine technology savvy with expertise in strategy, instructional design, development, operations and measurement. Our consultants are dedicated learning practitioners, many having led or managed large-scale learning initiatives themselves prior to joining Intrepid.

To learn more, or to speak with a learning consultant, please visit: www.intrepidls.com or call 877.866.4457.

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