

Recruiting Students for University-Level eLearning

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Abstract- University-level eLearning is growing everywhere. In the USA, there is no field of study in which eLearning is not used. Most developed countries are competing in offering eLearning programs. Most developing countries have already established or in the process of establishing eLearning programs. Some university-level eLearning programs are highly profitable such as at the University of Phoenix. Several university-level eLearning programs have failed badly such as at UKeU. One of the most important causes of failure is the lack of sufficient number of students. For example, UKeU expected 5,600 students but got only 900. This paper discusses the case of the University of Phoenix which is highly profitable but criticized for its questionable recruiting practice; the case of failure of UKeU; and sample recruiting techniques such as social network for recruiting students, SEO and similar techniques in getting listed on the first page of the result of Google search, cooperation with organizations with large pool of potential students, establishing special program for specific group such as Small and Medium Enterprise, and recruiting agents.

Keywords- Phoenix, recruiting agents, SEO, SME, social network, Student Recruitment, UKeU.

I. INTRODUCTION

Types of educational programs in the eLearning mode may be classified as K12,

corporate, and university. In the year 2007, the State of Michigan in the USA passed a law requiring all high school graduates to have taken at least one eLearning course. At the corporate level, most large organizations have adopted eLearning for their trainings. At the university level, eLearning is highly desirable and necessary, and some universities, like the University of Phoenix, have been highly profitable but some have failed badly. Therefore, it would be desirable to discuss the cases of success and failure as well as practices in recruiting students.

II. THE UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX WITH HIGH PROFIT BUT QUESTIONABLE RECRUITING PRACTICE

In term of profit, the universities in the USA may be classified as non-profit and for-profit. All State universities are supposed to be non-profit. Some private universities are also non-profit. All eLearning universities, such as University of Phoenix and Jones International University are for-profit. For the year 2009, ApolloGroup which owns Phoenix made a revenue and operating revenue of about 4 billion US\$ and 1 billion US\$ respectively. Phoenix offers over 100 degree programs at the associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. The admission policy is to admit any and all students who are qualified. The number of students has grown from only 8 students in the first class in the year 1976 to 420,700

undergraduate students and 78,000 graduate students in the year 2009. Phoenix has about 1,500 full-time and 20,000 part-time faculty members, resulting in about 93% of all faculty members being part-time. According to 2009 Online Education Database, Phoenix was ranked 28 out of 44 for best accredited online universities. Some of Phoenix's alumni are well-known such as U.S. Navy Admiral Kirkland H. Donald, White House cyber-security coordinator Howard Schimidt, and former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters, etc [1-4].

The University of Phoenix has been investigated concerning alleged student recruitment practices such as paying commissions to recruiters. As an example, Apollo Group, which is the mother company of Phoenix, paid the United States US\$ 67.5 million without acknowledging any wrongdoing.

III. UKEU FAILED BECAUSE OF LACK OF STUDENTS

Many documents are available about UKeU. This summary is based on three documents [5-7]. The UKeU idea started in the year 1999. In February 2001, the UK Secretary of State for Education proposed to offer UK higher education thru the Internet worldwide and UK e-Universities Worldwide Limited was established with 62 million British Pounds allocated. In March 2003, UKeU launched its first two programs with only 900 students which were far below the target of 5,600. As shown in Figure 1, the senior author of this paper signed an agreement with UKeU to represent UKeU in Thailand.



Fig. 1 Prof. Charmonman Signed an Agreement with UKeU

On February 2004, the UK Higher Education Funding Council for England (HERCE) terminated UKeU to change the policy to support universities and colleges directly rather than thru UKeU. The UK government lost 50 million British Pounds on the UKeU project.

Many reasons have been cited why UKeU failed. The first and the most important reason was that it failed to recruit sufficient number of students. The second reason was that UKeU project was started at the wrong time, i.e. just before the dot-com crash. The third reason was that UKeU used the supply-driven rather than the demand-driven approach. The fourth reason was that the brands of UKeU was not as strong as the classical UK brand like Oxford and Cambridge. The fifth reason was that UKeU spent too much time and money on designing new computer specifically for eLearning rather than using on-the-shelf machines.

IV. SOCIAL NETWORK FOR RECRUITMENT OF STUDENTS

Searching Google for "Social Recruiting", over 26 million entries were found as shown in Figure 2.

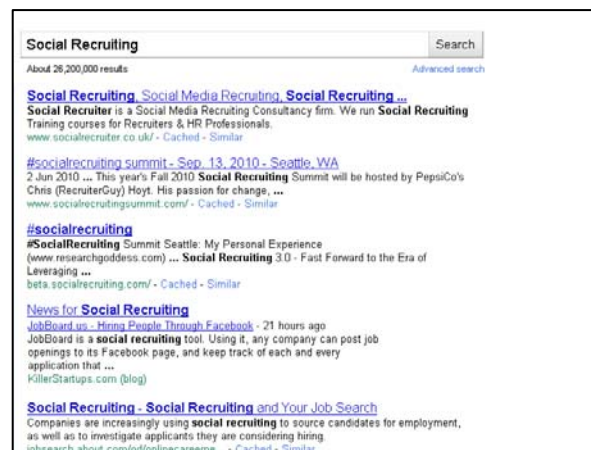


Fig. 2 Over 26 Million Entries for Social Recruiting

From the senior author television programs on "eMarketing" [8], the subtopics 24 – 29 are on Marketing with Twitter, FaceBook, MySpace, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Digg. Social networks have been used to recruit new students, keep existing students, advertise

existing and new educational programs, and get students to apply for admission.

Many social network tools are available for recruitment of students. Twitter tools include Twitter Directories and User Search Tools, Twitter Apps to Monitor Trends, Twitter Apps to Monitor Brand, Twitter Apps for Polls, and etc. FaceBook tools include FaceBook Page, FaceBook Group, FaceBook FanPage Engine, and etc. MySpace tools include Friend Blaster Pro, MySpace MyAds, MySpace Polls, and etc.

V. SEO AND SIMILAR METHODS

Search Engine Optimization or SEO [9] is the technique of improving the visibility of a website or a web page in Search Engine result without paying the Search Engine. A related technique is Search Engine Marketing or SEM in which payment is made to Search Engine to get the advertiser web on the right hand side of the first page of the search result. With SEO, editing the content and HTML and associated code may help.

In case of the Ph.D. in eLearning Methodology at the College of Internet Distance Education (CIDE) of Assumption University [10], the result similar to SEO was obtained because it is the first and only such program in the world. As shown in Figure 3, the first page of the result of searching Google gave 9 of 10 entries related to the program.



Fig. 3 Nine of Ten Entries on the First Page of Google Search

VI. COOPERATION WITH ORGANIZATIONS WITH LARGE POOLS OF POTENTIAL STUDENTS

Another effective technique to recruit students is to target organizations with large pools of potential students. CIDE approached the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (OSMEP) to offer short courses for members of SME in Thailand [11]. The total number of people working in SME in Thailand is about 9 millions. OSMEP kindly paid CIDE about 7.5 million Baht or about 250,000 US\$ to prepare courseware for 18 courses using SCITplus [12] as the Learning Management System. Members of SME can take the training in eLearning mode as well as taking exams free of charge. More than 50,000 members of SME have taken the courses and become CIDE potential students.

The 18 courses are:

- 1) SME101 SMEs Business Perception for Beginners
- 2) SME102 Foundation Marketing Management for SMEs
- 3) SME103 Financial Administration for SMEs
- 4) SME104 Accounting and Financial Budgeting Management for SMEs
- 5) SME105 Product Management and Services Administration for SMEs
- 6) SME106 SMEs Business Administration for Growing Sustainable Development
- 7) SME107 Business Opportunity Analysis and Strategic for SMEs
- 8) SME108 Creative Innovation for SMEs
- 9) SME109 Information Communication Technology and e-Commerce for SMEs
- 10) SME110 SMEs Business and Marketing
- 11) SME111 Risk Management and Controlling Internal Organization
- 12) SME112 Business SMEs Plan Writing
- 13) SME201 Role of the Office of SMEs Promotion
- 14) SME202 Product Brand Production
- 15) SME203 Knowledge Management for Small and Medium Enterprises
- 16) SME204 Capital Management Administration
- 17) SME205 Import and Export Management

18) SME206 Supply Chain and Logistics Management

VII. SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

In addition to organizations with very large pools of potential students like SME with 9 million people, there are smaller groups like large business enterprises from which their employees might like to take eLearning courses without interrupting their regular works. Assumption University has targeted commercial banks, and chain stores. An example of a specific educational programs may be a two-year program for Junior College graduates to get a Bachelor's degree.

The second example may be a specific MBA program for each of the large chain stores. The third example may be a Certificate on Design Management for a large pool of architects who would like to learn more about management.

The fourth example is for nurses who need to take courses every year. In the USA, medical doctors and nurses have to take courses such as on "Pain Mangement" and eLearning is very appropriate.

VIII. RECRUITING AGENTS

Educational institutions, both classroom-based and eLearning have been using recruiting agents. Searching Google for "recruiting agents for students" over 300,000 entries were found as shown in Figure 4.

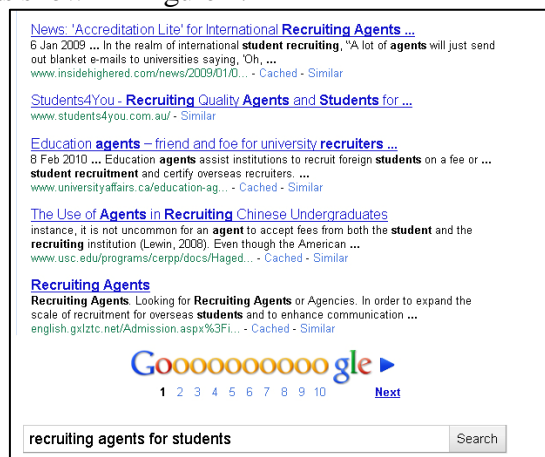


Fig. 4 Searching Google for "recruiting agents for students" over 300,000 Entries Found.

In September 2009, the US State Department issued a policy guidance that prohibit its 450 educational advising centers worldwide to provide advising services to or with commercial recruiter.[13] The guidelines are in accordance with the idea of many US higher educators who think commercial recruiting of students improper or even unethical. Providing financial commissions to student recruiting agents has been controversial in the USA but common practice in Australia and UK. The President of the American International Recruitment Council said that the State Department notice unfairly mars the reputation of all commercial recruiting agents.

The document entitles "The Use of Recruiting Agents in the United States" [14] stated that higher educational institutions in the USA have long been attractive to student on little more than their name and reputation. However, more and more USA colleges and universities have been using the services of commission-based recruiting agents

In Canada [15], efforts by Canadian universities to attract more international students have been successful thru commission-based agents. However, some Canadian universities do not work with agents.

IX. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Some eLearning universities such as the University of Phoenix has been highly profitable but criticized for questionable recruiting technique. Some other eLearning universities such as UKeU have failed badly because of uncessful recruiting practice. This paper has discussed the case of Phoenix and UKeU. Then sample recruiting techniques are presented. They are social network recruiting, SEO and related techniques, cooperation with organizations with large pools of potential students, establishing special programs for special groups like SME, and recruiting agents. As more and more universities are offering eLearning, recruiting is more and more important for the universities to survive. So, all eLearning universities should study recruiting

techniques and implement some of them for the benefits of all concerned.

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