CHAPTER VI

MARKETING OF DISTANCE EDUCATION – A SUGGESTIVE FRAMEWORK
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This chapter provides a suggestive framework for effective marketing of the Distance Education programme, not only by the study units, but also any Distance Education Institutes. This suggestive framework is the culmination of the findings from the responses of study units, their study centres and a cross section of their distance education learners.

This framework covers all the seven accepted marketing mix elements of service sectors with orientation towards learners. More precisely, the framework touches upon the academic programmes, the fees structure, delivery system, promotional activities, the physical evidence, processes involved and the people operating the system.

6.1 ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

The product mix of DEIs could be an intelligent mixture of both mass-based as well as class-based programmes. While mass-based programmes attract a good enrolment of learners, the class-based programmes could satisfy the requirements of the learners of the specific sectors. Again the DEIs could constantly endeavour in developing innovative programmes. This not only satisfy the requirements of the emerging new class of learners, but also acts as a powerful marketing tool and the DEIs which offer innovative programmes would naturally have a competitive edge over others. As pointed out already, the Anna University, Coimbatore, a latest entrant in the field of distance education has launched as many as 25 diversified Management programmes in 2007-08, the first year of its inception itself. I would be pertinent to mention here that the University Grants Commission is encouraging all the higher
education institutions to launch innovative programmes and they also provide special
grants for the purpose.

Hence it is suggested that all the DEIs should constantly assess the
requirements of the learners and the needs of industries and other organizations
particularly in the context of spurt in the growth of the economy in various spheres
which could form the base for identification and development of innovative
programmes, in addition to the mass-based programmes.

The study revealed that only Annamalai University and University of Madras
offer Science programmes in all branches, whereas the remaining study units did not
offer because of huge investments required to establish laboratory equipments and
difficulty in the conduct of face-to-face programme of long duration. However, it
should be mentioned here that it would not be an impossible proposition to offer
Science programmes through distance education, with the advancement of educational
technology such as, video conferencing, e-learning etc. It is true that creation of the
technological infrastructure require considerable investment and the skilled
professionals to operate them successfully, but once created, this would enable the
DEIs not only to offer the Science Programmes, but also other Arts and Management
Programmes in effective way. Another suggestion could be a Consortia approach
under which the laboratories could be established in different places and the DEIs
could share the resources by becoming a partner of such establishment. This would
help for optimum utilization of resources with less investments.

In the present day context of knowledge explosion, each individual must be a
multidisciplinarian. The individual must have knowledge on inter-related areas and
hence the DEIs could develop interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary programmes for
different disciplines and for different market segments. Some of the innovative
programmes that could be thought of combining Information Technology with Biology are Bio-informatics and Bio-sensors, Nanoscience and Technology etc. Similarly Management discipline could be combined with other disciplines and some of the new programmes that could be offered under this category are, Animal Health and Management, Telecom Management, Sports Management, Disaster Management, Hospital Management etc.

Regarding the pattern of programmes offered – either annual or semester, it was basically the Board of Studies concerned decide. But considering the nature of distance education learners and the time available to them, it is suggested that semester pattern could be preferable than annual pattern, due to the following reasons:

- Scope for learning more courses
- The learning load of learners dispersed
- Acquiring indepth knowledge becomes possible
- Makes the learners to have continuous learning throughout the year, instead of concentrating during the fake end of the year
- Convenience for learners who were employed, as it reduces the time of keeping off from their routine work for long days as it splits of absence.

When more the number of students take the programme, the lower the average per capita cost of development effort and vice-versa. It is this fact, coupled with the generally low direct costs of student support, that makes distance education an attractive economic proposition. Hence the DEIs should necessarily undertake evaluation of economic viability of each programme periodically and take appropriate action.
The Tamil Nadu Government has directed the Universities in Tamil Nadu under its control not to offer M.Phil. programme through distance education with effect from 2007-08, on the ground that offering research programmes through distance education might lead to dilution of standards. However, DEIs outside Tamil Nadu, and Private Universities in Tamil Nadu continue to offer M.Phil. programmes through distance education. Since distance education has been accepted as a mode of education, it is not wise to stop M.Phil. programme alone when even Engineering and Medical programmes are offered through distance mode in different parts of the world. Instead, it would be better if some regulatory mechanism could be in the place to ensure the quality of M.Phil. programmes instead of outright closure.

6.2 CURRICULUM

The analysis revealed that while a few universities have exclusive Board of Studies for drafting curriculum for academic programmes offered through distance mode, few other universities have a common Board of Studies for programmes offered through regular and distance modes. It is suggested that a separate Board of Studies be constituted with academic experts having experience and exposure in distance education since naturally they would have orientation towards the requirements of distance education learners, which is conspicuously absent with the members who do not have such an exposure.

Another related issue is the composition of the members of the Board of Studies. Traditionally, the Board of Studies consists of only academic experts, but considering the recent advancements in science and technology, the rapid changes in the industrial and economic scenario and the university-industry interaction, the Board of Studies need to have members representing industries, commerce, scientific and technological arena. This would certainly help for framing relevant and need
based curriculum that would suit the requirements of the different sectors of the economy.

It is also suggested that the curriculum of the existing programmes need to be revised/modified at least once in three years. However, the curriculum of courses like Computer & IT programmes, Tax Laws, Corporate Laws etc. where changes do happen frequently need to be updated every year, if necessary.

6.3 COURSE MATERIALS

Because of the insistence by the DEC in preparing the Course Materials under SIM pattern as a pre-condition for getting its approval, the DEIs are now in the process of developing/conversion of their course materials from conventional to SIM pattern. It is suggested that all the DEIs should necessarily develop their course materials under SIM pattern.

It is very much essential that the DEIs adopt the following principles while preparing the course materials:

❖ The materials must be in SIM format.

❖ Preparation of Course Materials requires creation of a Course Team comprising subject experts, instructional designers, external editors etc.

❖ Should prepare a comprehensive panel of subject experts for different disciplines and who underwent training in preparation of materials under SIM format.

❖ The DEI may also conduct training programme to the lesson-writers in developing course materials in SIM format.

❖ The task of material preparation to be assigned to the subject experts trained in preparation of materials under SIM format.
It is pertinent to mention here that the STRIDE of IGNOU conducts periodical training on SIM for lesson-writers and the DEC also provides financial support to the DEIs for conduct of Workshops for giving orientation to the lesson-writers.

The analysis revealed that except TNOU no other study units has shared their course materials with other DEIs. One of the basic canons of distance education management is 'resource sharing'. Hence there must be a better understanding among the DEIs to share their resources for mutual benefit. Further the DEIs, which found difficult to prepare the materials on SIM pattern, the IGNOU has a scheme of sharing their learning resources prepared under SIM with the DEIs on payment of prescribed price. Another recent development is that some of the leading publishers prepare the textbooks under SIM pattern/ undertake the job of developing tailor-made course materials for DEIs. DEIs can either adopt these materials published by the leading publishers or can get materials prepared through them for their specific curriculum.

The DEIs should have the policy of revising the course materials once in five years, even when there was no change in the curriculum. This is required to incorporate the latest changes/trends that have taken place in the respective field and also to include new illustrations, case studies, case laws etc. to enable the learners to get latest knowledge in the field. But whenever there is change in the curriculum, needless to mention they should necessarily go in for rewriting of course materials.

It is equally important that the lesson-writers must be paid suitable compensation to undertake this assignments.

It is essential that periodical feedback on the quality of course materials to be obtained from the learners, which could form effective input for revision/improvement of the materials.
It is equally important that the course materials to be delivered in neat packaging. Needless to mention that packaging provides protection to the materials, convenience to the learners to carry and acts as a marketing tool in attracting the attention of prospective learners.

It is suggested that the packaging material should be ecological friendly such as paper bag, folder etc. and also re-usable one. It would be better if vital information like the name of the DEI, list of programmes offered, contact details etc. are printed on the packaging material.

Similarly, label is an integral part of packaging and DEIs could use attractive pre-printed adhesive labels which could increase the elegance of packaging and act as promotional tool.

6.4 PROGRAMME FEE

The fee structure is one of the sensitive marketing issues that influences the learners to opt for a particular DEI. While fixing the fee structure, every DEI would normally fix the fees well above its cost. The DEIs could also fix their fee structure depending upon on the demand for a specific programme and also taking into consideration what other competing DEIs charge for the same programme. The DEIs established by the reputed educational institutions could adopt the policy of fixing a higher fees, capitalizing the corporate image they have already created. The new educational institutions which have established the DEI to adopt lower fee structure to successfully penetrate into the market. Similarly, the DEIs could also adopt discriminatory pricing, which means fixing different fees for different group of learners for the same programme. As pointed out already a few DEIs charge concessional fee for destitute women, prisoners, defence personnel, physically challenged and blind. Similarly concessional fee is charged also from the students of
regular programme and teachers and staff of the educational institutions. It would be
advisable to maintain stability in fees structure at least for a minimum period of five
years, whatever may be the pricing methods the DEIs adopt. But, in practice, the
DEIs adopt the combination of the above pricing methods for their various
programmes.

The wise policy is that, the fees for distance education programme be fixed to
meet the basic objectives of providing life-long, flexible, continuous and cost-
effective education to every needy person. In other words, no willing person should
be deprived of the utility of distance education just because of higher fees.

6.5 SERVICE DELIVERY

The location and channels are two key decision areas like any other services to
deliver education services to the target learners. Channel in distance education refers
to Service Delivery, which comprises of the DEIs, Study Centres and Learners.

6.5.1 Study Centres

The concept of Study Centres has come into stay in marketing distance
education programmes, as they act as ambassadors between the DEIs and the learners.
As mentioned already, the organization of Study Centres could be of any one of the
types such as Own Centres by the DEIs, recognizing Approved Schools/ Colleges as
Study Centres, by Franchising or approving Registered Trust/ Societies who were in
the education field. Each one of these categories have their own merits and
limitations. Considering these merits and limitations, it could be suggested that the
most appropriate form of establishing Study Centre is recognising Registered Trust/
Societies engaged in educational activities. This has been suggested since they have
both the qualities of public accountability as they are the registered organs and at the
same time can exhibit the initiatives and commitment of the private entrepreneurship.

It is suggested that an Effective Study Centre should have the adequate
administrative and academic infrastructure as mentioned below for providing
effective support service to the learners:

**Space Requirement:** It is desirable to possess a building with 2000 sq.ft. built in area,
Front office/ Information cell, Admission office, Computer lab, Classrooms, Library,
Store room.

**Resources/ Equipments:** Basic office equipments, Notice Boards, adequate Furniture,
good number of Books which includes copy of Course materials, Reference books
etc., minimum 5 to 10 Computer Systems with latest configurations and Internet
facilities, Multimedia equipments such as television, audio-video playback/ recorder,
LCD and OHPs etc.

**Staff Requirement**
- The person in charge of the Study Centre must be a graduate with
  administrative acumen to run the institution successfully.
- A Receptionist/ Counsellor at the Reception Counter/ Information Cell.
- A marketing/ public relation personnel to contact potential learners and
  organisations.
- To engage qualified and competent College/ University teachers to handle the
  PCP classes.
- Ministerial staff to look after all the admission/ administrative work.
- Office Assistants to provide necessary assistance.
Administrative/Academic Functions

1. To undertake promotional activities such as advertisements through different media such as Newspaper advertisements, hoardings, banners, posters, bit notices, leaflets, local cable network, vehicular advertisements, participating in educational fairs and exhibitions etc. to attract more enrolment.

2. It is advisable for the Centres to be kept opened preferably on Sundays and holidays to facilitate the working segment to have easy access.

3. To arrange effective and adequate number of days/hours of Personal Contact Programme.

4. To engage qualified and competent teaching faculty to handle the classes.

5. To ensure the distribution course materials to the learners immediately.

6. To issue and collect the Examination applications and retransmit the same to the DEIs.

7. To collect Course fee of II/III year from learners on time and forward the same to the DEIs.

8. To get feedback from the learners on various services rendered by the Study Centre.

9. To maintain the following Records and Registers:
   - Enquiry Register
   - Admission Register
   - PCP Learners Attendance Register
   - PCP Teaching Faculty Attendance Register
   - Fees collection Register
   - Course Material Distribution Register
   - Library Books Record etc.
Learner Support Services

- A well equipped library with a minimum of 500 volumes of books and subscribe to minimum 5 reputed journals relevant to the programmes offered by them.

- Provision of seating arrangements, clean drinking water, toilet facilities etc. for the learners and visitors to the Centre.

Further, for effective functioning, it is suggested that the following *innovative marketing practices* could be undertaken by the Study Centres:

- Other than PCP, Special Seminars/ Workshops relevant to the subjects be conducted for learners and it would be better to involve them by presenting papers in the Seminars, which would develop their presentation skills.

- Providing additional skill development programmes like communication skill, personality development, computing skills etc. at free of cost or low cost to their learners.

- Extend the internet facilities to the learners to enable them to refer to e-journals, articles and other required information related to their subjects.

- Develop industrial linkages which would help the Study Centres to cover the drop outs; to arrange for industrial training to their learners, if required; to acquire placement for their successfully rolled out learners.

However, it may be pointed out that mere number of study centers would not serve the purpose unless such centers are equipped with modern multimedia aids.

It is also suggested that the DEIs who have a good number of Study Centres could think of decentralisation of administration by establishing Regional Centres to monitor the performance of the Study Centres in the respective regions for increasing the administrative efficiency and to provide better learner support services.
Creation of Regional Centres

For effective and better management of Study Centres, it is suggested that the parent institution may create a Regional Centre as done by IGNOU/ certain Open Universities, under which each Regional Centre could be assigned the responsibility of monitoring the Study Centres located in their regions.

The Regional Centre may be vested with the powers of directing and monitoring the academic operations of the Study Centres in its region. A Regional Centre could be created for a minimum of 25 Study Centres for better and effective management.

The Regional Centres could be assigned with the following academic and administrative responsibilities:

**Academic Responsibilities of Regional Centres**

- To create awareness of the programmes offered through distance education system among the public in their region.
- To develop, coordinate and monitor support services rendered by the Study Centres in the region.
- To supervise and monitor the Study Centres under its purview and to pass on the information to the parent institution.
- To provide necessary training and development programme to the Personnel of Study Centres.
- To liaison with other educational institutions in that region to provide better academic input and for administrative support by identifying suitable institution as Examination Centres.
- To identify unserved areas in their region for establishing new Study Centres.
• To receive the Course Materials from parent institution and redistribute them to the Study Centres.

• To scrutinize the applications received from the Study Centres and make admissions. This could be made through a wide network of all Regional Centres with the parent institution, thereby reducing the administrative burden of the DEI and speed up the process of admission.

• To pass on the information and guidelines provided by the parent institution to the Study Centres and ensure their implementation.

• To organise Seminars/ Workshops relating to contemporary issues on distance education.

• To undertake Research in the field of distance education.

Administrative Responsibilities of Regional Centres

• To act as a liaison between the Study Centres and the DEIs.

• To undertake promotion activities such as, advertisement in different media, press release/interviews, participating in exhibitions, educational fairs etc.

• To effectively manage finance and materials.

• To maintain the Records/ Registers relating to Learners, Student Support Services, Furniture and Equipments, Study Centres, Counselling, Resource Persons, Library etc.

Apart from the above, the Study Centres should realise that they have taken up a noble profession of providing strong support for the successful offering of distance education service to the millions. Hence, more than the supervision and monitoring by the Regulatory Agencies such as Distance Education Council, UGC, AICTE etc. what is required is self-imposed discipline and a quality of commitment – commitment to the profession and commitment to the learners.
6.5.2 Personal Contact Programme (PCP)

Personal Contact Programme in distance education, should be organized in tune with the intended purpose, by taking into cognizance the real and felt needs, problems, difficulties of the learners, the convenience of the resource persons, financial implications in providing infrastructural facilities and the steps involved in scientific approach to organisation of PCP.

The study revealed that on an average the study units allot only 66 hours for MBA programmes, 96 hours for IT programmes, 102 hours for Science programmes, 48 hours for Arts programmes. The number of contact hours was less when compared to the recommendations of TANSCHE which prescribed a minimum of 100 contact hours for Management and Arts programmes and a minimum of 200 contact hours for Science and IT programmes. Hence it is suggested that all the DEIs must be instructed to conduct PCP for a minimum of 100 hours of duration for Arts and Management Programmes and a minimum 200 contact hours both for theory and practicals of Science and IT programmes.

It is suggested that the PCP should be organised during holidays for the convenience of the learners so that the large numbers would be able to attend the programme and derive benefit. It would also motivate the teachers and the DEIs/Study Centres which organize the programme.

It was found from the analysis that only for select programmes like MBA, IT and Science programmes, PCP was made compulsory and for all other programmes it was made optional. But it is suggested that the attendance in PCP for all the programmes should be made compulsory as this would enable the learners to get indepth knowledge on the subject besides getting clarification of doubts and for better preparation examinations.
It should be mentioned here that once PCP classes are conducted effectively, naturally the learners would be tempted to attend the programme, even if the attendance is not made compulsory.

Hence to make the programme effective and interesting, it is suggested that following steps need to be taken to make the PCP more effective:

- There should be a fixed time schedule for conduct of PCP, which should be duly mentioned in the Programme guide/handbook which should be supplied along with admission intimation, to enable the learners to plan well in advance to attend the programme since most of them were normally employed.
- The resource persons who are academically competent and trained in teaching distance education have to be engaged for taking the classes.
- A decent honorarium be paid to attract competent resource persons.
- Multimedia equipments to be made available to make the classes interesting.
- The venue of PCP should be easily accessible.
- The classes should have comfortable furniture.
- There should be proper ventilation and lighting in the classrooms.
- Clean drinking water and toilet facilities be made available at the PCP venue.
- Provision of facilities for food and accommodation to the learners would be desirable.
- Feedback to be obtained periodically from the learners regarding the conduct of PCP and based on which remedial actions be taken.
These findings have been corroborated with the responses of the sample learners taken for the study.

6.5.3 Assignments

The system of Assignments to Learners and their evaluation pattern followed by the study units reveal that TNOU has the system of assignments for all the programmes offered by them; whereas Annamalai University has the system of assignments only for select programmes such as MBA. The assignment responses carry normally 25 percent marks. But the evaluated assignments were not returned to the learners with any feedback. The remaining three study units did not have the system of assignments for any of the programmes offered by them. This indicates that there was no uniformity of having a system of assignments among the DEIs.

It is strongly recommended that all DEIs should have the component of assignment responses. This would help the learners to have a continuous touch with their academic study and would also provide indepth knowledge and understanding of the subject. It is also recommended that these assignments be evaluated, marks/grades awarded and it is very important that the feedback of the evaluator to be sent back to the learners in the form of ‘comments’ for their follow up. This grade/marks would constitute the Continuous Internal Assessment (CIA).

There was a sizeable number of learners who feel that the system of assignments be renewed as it would be comparatively easier to score marks in assignments which form part of total assessment rather than appearing for total marks in term-end examinations. But whatever may be the reason, it would be advisable for the DEIs to adopt the system of assignments. It is equally important that the assignment questions must also be framed in such a way that they would develop knowledge, comprehension, understanding and application part of the subjects.
6.5.4 Course Material Distribution

As mentioned already the print media still occupies a prime place in distance education. All the DEIs have the practice of providing print course materials to their learners. But no DEI has ensured the timely delivery of course materials to their learners. This is a serious issue and hence every DEI has to develop a foolproof system of delivery of course materials to the learners. But it is very often said, than done. This demands meticulous planning in preparing and printing of course materials and keeping them ready for distribution, once admission is confirmed. In fact, the success of any DEI largely depends on this single factor namely 'timely delivery of course materials'. As a saying goes, “Even a post card can do wonders if it is posted timely”.

Assuming that the course materials are readily available with the DEIs, still they are not delivered to the learners immediately on admission due to logistics problems. The logistic problem of distribution of course materials could be reduced by establishing Regional storing points, from where the course materials could be distributed with less difficulty to the nearest Study Centres located for instance around 100 kms. or each Regional Centre could serve around 25 Study Centres. When the storing points are located near the Study Centres like this, even Study Centres themselves would also find it easy to take delivery of the materials by themselves, instead of solely depending on the Regional Centres to despatch to them.

Another system was distribution of course materials through study centres and information centres to the learners but this system was also did not work very well because of ineffective/ lethargic attitude of the study centres in delivering the materials to the learners. As reported by the learners, the Study Centres either send the course materials to the learners or sometimes even did not inform the learners
about the receipt of course materials from the DEI. Ultimately it is the learners who had to run from pillar to post to get the course materials from the DEIs and/or from the Study Centres. Hence it is strongly recommended that DEIs should take up the entire responsibility of sending the course materials directly to the learners.

6.5.5 Instructional Electronic Media

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) facilitate the flow of information and knowledge and made it globally accessible to people at reasonable cost. Even though printed course materials were supplied to the learners by all the DEIs, every DEI could supplement the print media with electronic media of learning resources such as, teaching through CDs, audio-video programmes, radio and television broadcasts, vide-conferencing and e-learning to face the competition and challenges within and outside the country. In this connection, it should be mentioned that the learners also express their desire to be provided with video-conferencing and e-learning facilities.

The preparation of materials for electronic media requires constitution of a Course Team which comprises subject experts, instructional designers, external editors, web designers, software developers, audio/video script writers and media experts etc.

6.5.6 On-Line Education

The success of an online distance education programme is greatly dependent upon the course content, curriculum design and learning materials. These must take into account the interest and capabilities of the target group. A programme for Bachelor’s degree may be relatively straight forward with information interphased with activity that promotes critical thinking and application. On the other hand, a
programme for a middle-level executive in computer applications must, in addition, include activities that lay stress on collaborative learning and meta-cognitive learning. Pedagogical issues must occupy centre-space while designing and developing courses.

It is pertinent to quote the views of Whitlock (2001), who on the basis of answers received from course-participants, over a period of 20 years, has given 10 attributes of good online course. They were: clearly specified objectives, attractive presentation, clear sign-posting, ease of use, appropriate language, modular structure, variety of questions and problems, feedback on progress, testing (diagnostic and achievement), and logical sequence. Course designers need to take these into account in their quest for quality.

Considering the course requirements, type of content, course objectives, learner profile, and the interactivity levels required, the instructional design and training delivery strategies should be formulated. Also, at this stage, various administrative system requirements such as registration, access control mechanism, etc. to be formulated.

6.5.7 Tele-Conferencing

It was disturbing to note that, no study unit provided Video-Conferencing facility to their learners, even in the era of advanced technology that emerge in India. It should be mentioned here that before selecting this media, the DEIs should ensure the following:

- availability of adequately developed technology;
- accessibility of media to both teaching institution and the learners;
- acceptability to both teachers and learners;
- validity or appropriateness of the media in achieving the objectives of the learning materials; and
- cost-effectiveness – the price must be commensurate to its values and quality.

EDUSAT was the first Indian Satellite built exclusively for serving the educational sector in 2004. It is primarily meant for providing connectivity to school, college and higher levels of education and also to support non-formal education. It also supports curriculum-based education, effective teachers training and community participation.

It is suggested that the DEIs could acquire space in the EDUSAT and it is essential that they should have a well-prepared studio for EduSat Interactive Network in their campus. Since it is a two way communication system, the teacher who teach in a classroom in the campus of DEI could see and interact with the learners who were at the other end of each SITs. Learners of each SITs can also see and hear teachers and clear their doubts simultaneously. Even though the teacher and learners are not within four walls of a classroom, they can still interact each other as they are in a same location. Considering its vast benefit it is suggested that the DEIs could make effective use of the EDUSAT.

6.5.8 e-Learning

e-Learning is an innovative approach for delivering well-designed, learner-centred, interactive and facilitated learning environment to anyone, anyplace, anytime by utilizing the attributes and resources of the internet and digital technologies along with other forms of learning materials suited for open, flexible and distributed learning environment.

A successful e-learning system involves a systematic process of planning, design, development, evaluation and implementation to create an online environment where learning is actively fostered and supported. It is suggested that an e-learning
system should be meaningful to all stakeholder groups including learners, instructors, support services staff and the DEIs.

An e-learning programme is useful to learners when it is easily accessible, well-designed, learner-centred, affordable, efficient, flexible and has a facilitated learning environment. When learners display a high level of participation and success in meeting a course's goals and objectives, this can make e-learning meaningful to instructors. In turn, when learners enjoy all available support services provided in the course without any interruption, it makes support services staff happy as they strive to provide easy-to-use, reliable services. Finally, an e-learning system is meaningful to DEIs when it has a sound return-on-investment (ROI), a moderate to high level of learner satisfaction with both the quality of instruction and all support services, and a low drop-out rate.

6.6 PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

The tasks involved in evolving the right promotion and communication programme for marketing distance education of the DEIs are identification of target learners, determination of promotional objectives, developing the message content, structure, style and source, and selection of appropriate communication tools.

6.6.1 Advertisement

It was observed that the study units draw their own advertisement matter and very often send directly to the newspapers for publication. A few DEIs send their advertisements through advertising agencies, but none of the study units do avail the services of advertising agencies/professionals for designing advertisement or developing the message. Consequently, the advertisements issued by the study units lack attraction. It is here the private educational institutions which offer distance
education programmes have an edge over the study units since they publish the
advertisements or information brochure or the handbook in a more professional way
to attract the attention of the prospective learners and to influence them. It is strongly
recommended that the DEIs could utilise the services of advertising agencies
considering their professional expertise in the field.

Further the DEIs should undertake scientific method of evaluating the
effectiveness of the advertisements in reaching the prospective learners, in terms of
media, message, content, color, design, size, layout, time, frequency, budget, etc. and
develop their advertisement and publicity campaigns in innovative and effective way
to attract good number of prospective learners. As mentioned already the DEIs could
use the services of Advertising agencies and professionals in this field for undertaking
the evaluation and to draft right message and to choose the right media.

6.6.2 Sales Promotion

The various sales promotional tools and techniques suitable to market distance
education programmes are: Information Brochure, Fee Concessions, Trade Fairs and
Exhibitions.

Information Brochure: The DEIs could prepare attractive information brochures for
promotion and publicity. The brochure should contain all the information and salient
features of the DEI and the Programmes offered in brief.

Fee Concession: The DEIs could provide fee concession to the students who pursue
their degrees through regular mode to motivate them to join any of the Certificate/
Diploma/ P.G. Diploma programmes. A certain percentage of fee concession could
be allowed to destitute women, prisoners, persons affected in natural calamities as a
sort of their social responsibility.
Education Fairs and Exhibitions: ‘Seeing is believing’ is a concept behind large scale exhibitions. Now-a-days exclusive education trade fairs are also conducted both inside and outside the country wherein thousands of people could get an opportunity to know about many service providers and their special offerings under one roof. Hence the DEIs could take part in the Education Fairs and Exhibitions to create awareness, to provide necessary details about the programmes offered and even plan for spot admissions.

6.6.3 Public Relations

One of the major criticisms against the DEIs is the poor responses to learners enquiries, as revealed by the learner respondents. This indicates that the employees of DEIs lack the quality of sensitiveness to the problems of learners. The study has revealed that except University of Madras which has a separate Public Relations Office to attend to the enquiries of the learners, other study units do not have any such organised system.

Hence, it is suggested that every DEI should create a separate ‘Public Relations Office’ to attend to the needs of the learners. The PRO office should be headed by a Public Relations Officer assisted by an APRO with a team of two or three trained staff members in order to handle the problems of learners and solve them efficiently. All the information both from the administrative and examination wings should be provided to the PRO office so that it could act as a single window redressal agency to the learners.

In fact, the persons in the Reception/ Enquiry counters of the DEIs act as sales personnel and it is their duty to convert the visitors into the learners. This means that they should possess all the qualities required of a successful sales person such as, knowledge about the history of the DEI, programmes offered, the fees structure,
availability of study centres and all other relevant details, and above all the quality of empathy, positive attitude and patience. Even it could be said that the DEIs could arrange special training to the employees who man the Reception/Enquiry counters to develop required sales skills and qualities. In fact, the success of DEI depends on the success of the people in the Reception Counters.

6.7 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Besides the quality of the academic input, the physical infrastructure such as the buildings; the appearance and the quality of the printing of the prospectus, programme guides, course materials; the elegant appearance and quality of identity card etc. do act as a powerful tool in marketing distance education services by creating positive impact on the minds of the learners.

The size, design and appearance of the buildings acts as strong physical evidence of the DEI. Hence a systemic model exclusively suited to the operation of distance education need to be designed by the DEIs with provision for Information and counselling, student enquiry, grievance redressal, administration, admission, despatch, finance, materials, multimedia, and Conference/Meeting Hall. Besides, the building should have provision for student waiting room, canteen, bank extension counters, post office, photocopying facilities, telephone facilities, drinking water, toilet facilities etc.

The building should be designed in such a way that each section should have required space according to their level operations. Wherever required the sign boards should be kept to guide the new visitors to the DEI. This would not only facilitate the visitors for easy mobility within the DEI but also create a positive impact among them.
The DEIs should have a separate library located in their building with copies of all the course materials, textbooks, audio, video cassettes, CDs, subject related as well as distance education related reputed journals, magazines, research abstracts, encyclopedias, monographs etc. Provisions should be made to browse e-journals by the learners, to enable them to have extensive reading and knowledge on their subjects. This has been corroborated with the findings of learner respondents.

It would be better if the Examination wing of DEI is located in the DEI building itself so that the learners could get their grievances in admissions as well as examinations redressed through a single window system. Further, this would facilitate administrative convenience to carry out the changes in addresses of the learners, clearance of II/III year course fees etc.

It would be better if banks extension counter is located in the DEI campus, to execute all financial transactions such as collection and remittances of fees, deposits, payments etc.

Further, the DEIs should give due importance on the physical appearance and quality of Student Identity Cards, Information Brochure, Prospectus and Course Materials which help create positive impact among the learners and increase the image of the DEI.

A few suggestions on these are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Identity Card</th>
<th>The Student Identity Card to be prepared in art board, printed and laminated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Brochure</td>
<td>To be prepared in foreign art paper with attractive color, design, pictures and text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus</td>
<td>Artistically designed, pleasing multicolor foreign art board with 90-100 GSM may be used for wrapper. The text printed with two colors with font size of 12 point Arial font on 70 GSM foreign art paper. The size may be double crown or demy size.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Material:

Size: Double crown

Paper: Super printing white paper or Creamwove paper of 80 GSM

Wrapper: Multicolor Foreign Art Board of 100 GSM

Font size: 12 point Arial or 13 point Times New Roman, followed uniformly in all the course materials

Printers may be instructed to follow quality printing and stick to the delivery time of 15 days from the date of receipt of the order. To ensure this and monitor the printers, an agreement could be executed with them.

6.8 STAFF OF DEIs

The DEIs can have excellent physical infrastructure, adopt innovative promotional tools, possess advanced educational technologies, but all these things will have a meaning only if the people working in the DEI, whether academic or administrative, render their services effectively and efficiently for the success of the DEI. In short, it is the people who shapes the organisation, their success and culture.

For effective management of the DEI, it should have the right manpower, with right quantity and right quality. Hence, for its effective functioning, the DEI should have the scientific manpower assessment, including scientific job description and job specification.

Considering the nature of the DEI, it should have a reasonable composition of permanent and administrative staff, preferably one third of permanent staff and two-third of temporary staff for cost-effective management of distance education system.

It is very much imperative that while recruiting the academic staff and the administrative staff such as Director, Public Relations Officer, Deputy Registrar, Assistant Registrar etc. the DEIs should make it mandatory that they should possess M.A./ P.G. Diploma in Distance Education as an essential qualification besides their subject specialization. In respect of other administrative staff, possessing P.G.
Diploma in Distance Education should be made as “desirable qualification”. The DEIs could also consider providing an additional increment as an incentive to the existing staff who qualifies with M.A/PG Diploma in Distance Education to motivate them to undergo such programmes. So that people with sound knowledge on distance education would occupy these positions and effectively discharge their duties for the development of distance education.

It is also suggested that the administrative staff including top-level administrators are to be periodically trained for effective management of DEI and to have orientation in learner-oriented functioning, which requires training in the following areas:

- To possess adequate professional knowledge and skill in the field of distance education
- To keep the records and registers in prompt and systematic manner
- To prepare official notes, circulars, statements on time with neat execution
- To share the work of colleagues at times of need, to maintain the equipment
- To possess positive attitude towards learners, to have thorough understanding of collective and complex nature of work and responsibilities
- To be prompt in attending to learners enquiries and grievances, to be polite and possess the quality of empathy while dealing with learners
- To develop the qualities of self-discipline and sense of responsibility.

Since the DEIs either draw the teaching faculty from conventional system or fresh recruits without any exposure/knowledge on distance education system, they need to be given orientation training in distance education to provide better student support services to the learners; to build relationship among the learners, faculty and
the administration; and to suggest suitable strategies to improve the quality of services to learners.

Some of the potential areas of training in distance education system are:

- Basics of distance and open education and relevant knowledge about the distance teaching institution(s);
- Curriculum development;
- Communication technology including on-line teaching;
- Preparation of Print materials under self-instructional method;
- Audio/video materials (scripting, identifying areas for audio/video programmes);
- Assignments/ evaluation (policies and procedures); Counselling and tutoring;
- Team work, time management etc.

The DEIs have to motivate their staff to undertake research projects in the field of distance education which would go a long way in improving the functioning of DEIs. It is to be mentioned here that the DEC is encouraging research activities in the ODL institutions by making available sufficient funds for research projects.

6.9 PROCESS

The DEIs should remember that the process mix is the execution of part of the policies and decisions of the administrators towards better services to the learners.

The following processes in administration of DEI are recommended effective management of the DEI in the competitive marketing environment.
6.9.1 Admission Domain

The DEIs have to establish a separate Information Cell with trained personnel to attend to the enquiries and provide necessary information and guidance to the prospective learners. A separate ‘enquiry register’ to be maintained in the Information Cell and date-wise enquiries received and action taken must be recorded. In addition, there must be proper monitoring mechanism in which a senior official in the rank of Superintendent should verify the enquiry register periodically and ensure that those enquiries were attended to and replied. Further, it is recommended that the DEIs must necessarily provide 24 hours Help-line Services for the convenience of learners who are at distant places.

The DEIs should take care that the Application Form for admission should contain all the relevant information required for considering the candidate for admission to a specific programme and also the socio-demographic particulars of the learners. Similarly, the Prospectus should provide basic information and necessary guidelines to the learners starting from admission till the completion of the programme.

It is suggested that the DEIs could prepare Programme Guide for each programme which should contain the details of courses offered under the particular programme, syllabus, supportive learning materials available, schedule of PCP, assignment questions, schedule of payment of fees, details of examination centers, procedure for registering examination etc.

To fasten the admission confirmation, the DEIs could go in for admission online or develop a software and a copy of it to be provided to the Study Centres with an instruction to feed the data of the eligible candidates in the prescribed structure and
to send a soft copy along with the filled-in applications while forwarding applications to the DEI.

All the payments either directly to the DEI or through the Study Centres must be in the form of Demand Draft or Challans through banks only and in no case cash transactions be entertained.

Every DEI should have a Grievance Redressal Cell with trained personnel who should maintain a ‘Grievance Redressal Register’ to record the grievances of the learners, action taken to redress the grievances and the mode of communication to the learners – mail/ e-mail/ telephone. This Register should be periodically checked by a supervisory cadre personnel for the smooth and effective functioning of the Cell.

6.9.2 Academic Domain

It is strongly recommended that for State dual mode universities, the respective State Government should insist that they get approval from relevant National Regulatory Bodies before launching their academic programmes. It is pertinent to note here that the Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education (TANSCHE) has recently sent a circular to all the State Universities offering distance education in Tamil Nadu that they should get approval from the national bodies.

The ideal process of material production and distribution should commence from forecasting the enrolment and assessing the actual requirements of course materials with reasonable precision. For DEIs, the ideal period of forecasting and keeping the ready stock would be a minimum of three years. It is also suggested that a minimum period of one year is required as ‘Preparation Time’ between the conception and launching of any new academic programme as it involves developing
the curriculum, writing and printing of course material and keeping them ready for
distribution to the learners, the moment they enrolled.

Hence what is required is the identification of committed lesson-writers, close
monitoring of the whole system by the officials concerned, better administrative and
financial autonomy to the person heading the DEI and above all the quality of
empathy and wisdom on the part of the bureaucrats to provide necessary support to
the DEI.

The basic responsibility of the educational institution is to provide teaching
and hence needless to mention that it should be the responsibility of the DEIs to
conduct the PCP on their own. Shifting of this responsibility to the study centre is
certainly not acceptable. Since the study centres who do not have the required
professional skill and resources and reluctant to part with their financial resources,
cannot do any justice in providing the required service to the learners. Hence there
must be a strong direction from the Government and other Regulatory bodies to the
DEIs that this teaching part of the distance education cannot be and should not be
delegated to anybody else and it is the prime responsibility of the DEIs to do it on
their own. As pointed out already, with the advancement of information technology,
it would not be a difficult task for the DEIs to take up the teaching responsibility
directly through on-line.

6.9.3 Task Schedules

There must be a specific time schedule from the date of receipt of applications
till the issue of admission confirmation and this should be mentioned in the Student
Handbook/ Prospectus so that the learner will be aware of the time schedule within
which he/she would be receiving the information about his admission status.
The DEIs should prepare a Schedule of advertisements, which comprises of the details of the media, timing and frequency of advertisements, so that the amount invested on advertisements can bring maximum return in terms of responses for admission. Similarly a scientific allocation of funds for advertisement must also be made in the budget.

Similarly definite time schedule should also be followed and communicated to the learners regarding the course material distribution, examination schedule and declaration of results.

6.9.4 Evaluation Domain

To overcome the grievances of learners in getting the examination application forms, examination fees to be paid and the last date for submission, the DEIs can follow the pattern of IGNOU which includes the examination fees along with the course fees with the conception that all the learners would appear for the examinations for the first time. The respective examination application format be provided in the Programme Guide.

It would help the learners if the DEIs incorporate the Examination Application Form, Examination Schedule, possible Examination Centres and the time of declaration of results in the Programme Guide to plan and to take up their examinations without any anxiety. As corroborated by the learner respondents, it is suggested that the Hall-Tickets could be sent directly to the learners atleast one week before the commencement of examinations. The DEIs in addition to website, could also announce results over mobile phones to facilitate the learners to know their results immediately. Further, it is reasonable if the DEIs declare their results within a time span of two months and despatch the Mark Statements and Certificates within
one month from the date of publication of results, to facilitate the learners to take up higher studies and also to seek employment.

It is also suggested that the DEIs could develop a system of registering for Examinations through on-line for the learners in far-off places. It is recommended that the Degree Certificates should incorporate the recognition of the University/DEI, such as "Recognised by the State University Act" and, "Accredited with DEC/NAAC/NCTE/AICTE" etc., "Member of AIU, COL" etc., which shows the genuineness and recognition of the University which would help the learners in a great way when they go for higher education or employment, according to the opinion of the learner respondents.

When the distance education has become an accepted mode of education, and though all the learners who have successfully rolled out may not be admitted to receive their degrees in person, it is strongly recommended that atleast the Rank holders in each programme could be allowed to participate and receive their degrees in Person in Convocation, as a sort of motivation. This would also give a feeling to the learners that they are also treated on par with the students of regular mode.

As expressed by the learners it is suggested that the DEIs and Study Centres can have working hours from 8.00 a.m. till 8.00 p.m. to enable the learners to approach them after their working hours. It is also recommended that for the convenience of the learners the DEIs and Study Centres could make Sunday as working day and declare holiday on any week days.

It is recommended that the dual mode universities could create a separate website for its DEI as felt by the learner respondents.
6.10 CONCLUSION

It is also to be pointed out here that in almost all universities, DEIs are considered as revenue generating bodies. It is ironical that sometimes even the reasonable requirements of DEIs were not met and the major portion of their revenue were diverted to meet the requirement of regular programmes.

But it must be ensured that DEIs get adequate financial support from its own generation to meet the requirements of learners and to offer effective services.

It should be remembered that commercialisation of distance education in the country like India where a big chunk of population is illiterate and living below the poverty line will crush the mission of distance education.

To overcome the evident weaknesses in the DEIs have made several suggestions. On the academic there is a need for the DEIs to adopt distance-education teaching-learning methodologies. This includes making the course materials self-instructional, putting them in distance-education format, introducing electronic media as supplement to print material, provide well equipped study centres, make arrangements for face-to-face counseling, have an efficient delivery system, and provide for assessment of assignments. Special stress has been placed on staff development, improvement in the quality of course materials, establishing efficient student support services, networking, and above all on the provision of liberal funding.

Distance Education is flexible and, therefore, demands constant change and orientation. Our effort should be directed towards educational expansion in favour of the disadvantaged, differently-abled and women; offering IT-enabled and IT-enhanced education and training; sustainability and convergence; active student
learning, institutional networking and resource sharing, and community-based learning; widening the scope of accreditation and quality assurance; internationalisation of education; empowerment of human beings at large through skill development and capacity building for learning to learn and lifelong learning.