An Investigation into the Feasibility of the Development of a Marketing Strategy for Independent Schools in KwaZulu-Natal

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Abstract

Due to increased competition in the private school sector in South Africa, marketing has become an imperative activity to attract and retain clients and therefore sustain private schools. The study aimed to investigate the feasibility of developing a marketing strategy for independent schools in KwaZulu-Natal. The target population consisted of executive heads, marketing management and members of the Parent Association Committee of an independent school group in KwaZulu-Natal. A qualitative research methodology was employed and an exploratory research strategy used. The key findings of the study suggested that the lack of a competitive marketing strategy of the private school group was school-specific and therefore it was feasible to develop a marketing strategy. The factors contributing to these schools' lack of competitive marketing strategies was an assemblage of ineffective and uncompetitive marketing mix elements. Budget constraints and a lack of communication had the most significant impact on the competitiveness of these schools. It was recommended that management should: place greater emphasis on tailoring the marketing mix elements in line with the nature of each Private School; necessitate effective communication to all stakeholders; and endeavour towards satisfying their clients' wants and needs.

Key Words: Private School Sector, Marketing Strategies.

Introduction

A marketing strategy is the "bigger picture" of an organisation's actions in some market. A marketing strategy is developed for the purpose of achieving all marketing goals. It is established from marketing research to produce a supreme marketing mix to attain maximum profit potential and to achieve a competitive advantage in the market. Thus, a marketing strategy outlines the process a firm can employ to deal with competitive challenges in the environment. This is accomplished by identifying the target markets and satisfying the requirements of those target markets using the marketing mix elements within budget limitations. The development of a competitive marketing strategy in any organisation is a prerequisite for the organisation's long-term survival in an expanding and competitive industry. One of the essential steps before developing a marketing strategy is to investigate the feasibility of developing a marketing strategy.

A feasibility study analyses the practicality of an idea and while also answering the question of whether the firm should proceed with the proposed marketing strategy to avoid wasting time and resources.

Background to the Study

Over the past decade there has been an increase in middle class South African citizens. Most of these individuals are parents or guardians who have realised the importance of high quality education and this combined with the limited availability of enrolment at 'high functioning fee-charging' public schools; has propagated the proliferation of independent schools. According to the Department of Basic Education's 2014 School Realities Report, there are 1 681 registered independent schools with 538 421 learners in the country and since 2009 there has been an increase of 40% in the number of learners entering independent schools (Makholwa, 2015a:1). Competition in the independent school sector in South Africa is positioned to intensify over the next decade as this fast-growing business entices more entrepreneurs to venture into it (Makholwa, 2015b:1).

Statistically, this private school group holds the most significant number of independent schools in South Africa. Over recent years, the group has grown exponentially due to their acquisition and development of campuses and vacant land. It is projected that they will continue to grow in the upcoming years with the objective of having 80 schools by 2020. The model of the group is scalable due to the individual nature of each campus and their philosophy is centred on quality educators and principals. The group implements a standardised curricula and ensures high quality of education throughout the schools. Their management ensures that educational and financial standards are maintained. Additionally, the management oversees the synergistic sale and purchase of educational resources and school uniforms and the employment of high quality educators across each school.

The group constantly invests in infrastructure to continually improve their schools network through mobile device management, governance, business intelligence and information systems. Their competitors are AdvTech, the Centurus Group, Maravest and Pearson who despite not having as many branches as this group have earned a good reputation with parents and have elicited their interest. As a result, parents have more options and the challenge of choosing the more superior schools which differ on models and teaching styles (Makholwa, 2015b:1). According to a previous study conducted by Immelman and Roberts-Lombard (2015:3), the group lacks a clear and aggressive marketing strategy and therefore lack the ability to incontestably ensure their longevity and progress in the industry (McGovern, 2012:10).

Problem Statement

In South Africa, the expansion of independent schools has gained momentum introducing a host of competitors into the industry. Prospective guardians or parents have an array of independent schools to choose from. Thus to survive, independent schools have to be more marketing orientated (Immelman and Roberts-Lombard, 2015:3). The group comprise the majority of independent schools in South Africa; however, they do not have a clear and dynamic marketing strategy to formidably rival their competitors' popularity with their target market (Immelman and Roberts-Lombard, 2015:4). As a result, there has been a mass exodus of learners from the private schools in the group in KwaZulu-Natal and a loss of clients' confidence in these schools. Subsequently, this has impacted on the revenue of these schools which has imposed budget constraints on essential schooling activities and necessary facilities. Furthermore, there has been a high turnover of educators in these schools as educators' morale has been negatively affected which has influenced the quality of education at these schools. The assumption is that the current marketing strategies of the group in KwaZulu-Natal are uncompetitive and that all clients dissatisfied with the current marketing efforts.

Research Questions

The study endeavoured to answer the following questions:

- What are the factors contributing to the group's lack of a competitive marketing strategy?
- What critical success factors influence parents' or guardians' selection of schools within the group and what is their perspective on the current marketing efforts?
- What recommendations can be made to the management of the group in KwaZulu-Natal regarding their development of a competitive marketing strategy?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study was that the private school sector would benefit due their improved understanding of how marketing could enhance the supply and quality of education. It would also inform private schools of how marketing mix elements could be detrimental to the school's sustainability when employed ineffectively and beneficial when aligned with the needs and wants of their clients. The study focused on identifying factors what management believed contributed to their lack of a competitive marketing strategy which provided an insight into how management of private schools perceived the role of marketing in their schools' competitiveness and survival in the market. In doing so it explored what clients of private schools deemed as critical success factors and what factors contributed to their dissatisfaction of the school. Thus the study would assist the group in improving their competitiveness in the sector. As the study identified reasons for educators' high turnover, the findings of the research would afford methods to the group on how to retain their educators and ensure their job satisfaction. The improvement of educators' morale would motivate them to achieve the mission of the school which is to provide high quality education and to create a loving ethos for learners.

As a result, educator turnover would be reduced. Due to the subsequent improved efficiency, performance and productivity of educators, the supply of learners would proliferate and more expert educators would be attracted to the school. This would increase the income into the school to provide better service and product offerings to clients of the group. This would also reduce the funds required to train and develop new educators on 21st century teaching which could alleviate budget constraints on essential elements of the marketing mix. Thus the competitiveness of the group's marketing strategy would be enhanced. The findings of the study could inform management on how to better lead and manage their school such that the school's objectives could be achieved and clients' confidence in the school could be restored and enhanced. Subsequently, as literature on the marketing of private schools in South Africa was limited, the findings of the study would be relevant to similar private schools, colleges and universities regarding how they could enhance their competitive advantage. Additionally, the findings of this study could supplement the existing literature on private school marketing within a South African context and would therefore be significant to the field of marketing as a whole. From investigating management's perceptions, it was deduced that it was feasible to develop a marketing strategy for the group in KwaZulu-Natal but that it would entail a school-wide involvement to develop and implement a competitive marketing strategy.

Literature Review

The development of marketing strategies is explored with the objective of identifying factors that make a school competitive or non-competitive in the industry. Three schools in the group in the KwaZulu-Natal region are discussed in light of their current market offerings. Recommendations to the management of the group regarding the development of competitive marketing strategies to ensure their sustainable growth in the industry are outlined.

Marketing of schools

Marketing in schools is a novel field that is fast gaining momentum in countries like South Africa, Hong Kong, Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States. As a result, the marketing concept is not understood by many schools and headmasters simply market their school based on their own discretion rather than analysing their clients preference and choice (Immelman and Roberts-Lombard, 2015:2). Understanding and acting on parents' preferences and choice allows for effective marketing of schools. The principle concern of schools will always be learners' needs which are enhanced by marketing endeavours. A study by Bland, Church and Luo (2014:2) revealed that the marketing of schools improved the quality of education and increased learner enrolment.

Environmental analysis

Management's decision on what strategy to implement is dependent on the internal situation of the organisation and its external environment. The macro environment, task environment and internal environment collectively form the environment (Thompson, Strickland and Gamble 2010:73). Organisations must examine six main forces in the macro environment namely, political and legal, economic, sociocultural, technological, ecological and international (Kotler and Keller, 2012:74).

Research Methodology

The research design is the predetermined blueprint that the researcher follows when conducting the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012:138). It distinctly denotes what data is needed, the methods that will be employed to collect and analyse the data and how the examination and interpretation of the data will satisfy each of the research questions. It concentrates on the final result of a problem (Saunders *et al*., 2012:138). There are different types of research design.

Exploratory Research Studies

Exploratory research studies are often employed to probe a topic in order to generate new ideas and insight about its inherent nature (Kumar, 2011:11). Exploratory research is applicable when there is insufficient current research on the topic and the time frame to conduct the research is limited. In light of the study, an exploratory research design was employed to identify the different variables that may have assisted in establishing the research objectives. The subsequent research questions were exploratory and probed into the main factors that influenced the research. It was decided to employ an exploratory study as the study endeavoured to gain the opinion of the executive head, the marketing manager and a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) member of each of the three schools in the group in KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, as little research literature on the problem at hand was available, exploratory studies was the preferred research design of choice. The inductive research approach was employed. This was due to the fact that the study had a flexible structure to it by eliciting qualitative data from the respondents of the group in KwaZulu-Natal in the form of interviews. The interviews allowed the researcher to search for patterns to investigate the feasibility of developing a marketing strategy for the group in KwaZulu-Natal.

Research Philosophy

According to Bryman and Bell (2013:15) research philosophy is an idea on how data about an occurrence should be collected, analysed and interpreted. Interpretivism is contrary to positivism. It enforces that a strategy must be in readiness to facilitate for respect instead of discrimination towards peoples' differences (Bryman and Bell, 2013:17). A branch of interpretivism is Phenomenology. This is a branch of interpretivism which inquires on peoples' consciousness of the world and how they make sense of it (Bryman and Bell, 2013:18). The study at hand employed phenomenology.

Rationale for Methodology

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013:7), research is a methodical, systematic, unbiased and scientifically accurate probe into research questions to achieve a comprehensive solution. Research is defined as a process of systematically gathering data on a specific phenomenon from numerous sources with a precise purpose of uncovering new insights, principles and facts via interpretation of data collated. Research termed basic/fundamental research can be employed to solve pre-existing issues in certain situations and research termed applied research helps to problem solve current situations (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013:5). Research methodology is illustrative of the ways in which research should be carried out and the tools necessary to gather and examine information to discover solutions to the research problem (Saunders *et al.*, 2012:3). A qualitative research method was chosen to conduct the study based on the nature of the data required.

Surveys

Conducting surveys is a commonly employed method that is generally associated with the deductive approach. It is usually in the form of a questionnaire and is an exceptional strategy for researching large samples. Researchers must make sure that the sample selected is illustrative of the entire population. Surveys are a quantitative research method that lends itself to both descriptive and exploratory methods. Surveys are more feasible and afford the researcher a specific amount of control over the conducted research. A disadvantage of surveys is the lack of control that researchers have over the time taken by respondents to complete the survey (Saunders *et al.*, 2012:144).

Research Strategy

As the study was qualitative in nature, a phenomenological research strategy was employed which involved conducting open ended, in-depth interviews to obtain primary data. As the study focused on investigating the feasibility of developing a marketing strategy for the group in KwaZulu-Natal, the opinions and responses of key people such as management and parents of the group were pivotal sources of information which could only be acquired using phenomenological research strategies, namely face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, the chosen sample group was relatively small. The purpose of employing such a research strategy was that respondents' responses could be clearly understood.

Target Population

A particular set of people from which data is gathered in accordance with a particular study objective is referred to as the target population. The target population comprised the executive head, the marketing management and the PAC that participated in the interviews in the three schools in KwaZulu-Natal. The total management and parent body complement at the group in KwaZulu-Natal was approximately 100 individuals.

Sampling

Sampling involves the selection of participants from a segment of the population to take part in the research study. This population segment is called the sample (Kumar, 2015:193). Sampling is categorised into two types that is non-probability and probability sampling (Saunders *et al.*, 2012:212). With regards to the current study's research questions and objectives, a non-probability sampling method was employed which was purposive sampling.

Pilot Study

A pilot study is also called a feasibility study. The purpose of conducting a pilot study is to detect possible faults in the data-collection instruments. A pilot study involves conducting the study on a small-scale to evaluate conducting a fully-fledged study and to fine-tune the research instrument (Brink, Van der Walt and Van Rensburg, 2006:166). With regards to the study, a pilot study was conducted to ensure the validity of the interview questions. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, a pilot study with one member of management and one parent of one of the schools in KwaZulu-Natal was conducted. Their identity and responses were kept confidential. The representatives were not part of the sample but they had similar characteristics to those of the target respondents. Their participation was in aid of assessing the appropriateness and relevance of the interview questions to the study. The result of the pilot study revealed that there were some redundant questions and questions that lacked content validity. These erroneous interview questions were either omitted or revised.

Data Analysis

The process of inspecting, assessing and translating collected data with the purpose of discovering new insights of a study is called data analysis (Saunders *et al*., 2012:413). According to Saunders *et al*., (2012:414), data collection and analysis are dependent on each other. This means that positivist research will require data collection and analysis methods that are quantitative which was therefore not used in the study (Saunders *et al*., 2012:328). As the study involved phenomenological research, qualitative data analysis was employed. Qualitative data analysis involves expressing meanings using words and conducting analysis using conceptualisation. Qualitative analysis strategies are deductive and inductive analysis (Saunders *et al*., 2012:390). Qualitative data can be presented by using linear-analytical presentation, chronological structures, theory-building structures and comparative structures (Saunders *et al*., 2012:390). It can also be analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) which affords a host of advantages but packages are generally not readily available (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006:80). In the study once the data was recorded, it was transcribed and the transcribed data was analysed. The CAQDAS used was called NVIVO which employed inductive thematic analysis. This derived common themes to afford a description and an understanding of collected data. Inductive thematic analysis helped in identifying common patterns and themes from the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006:80). Deductive thematic analysis was not used as it is less informative (Braun and Clark, 2006:6).

Validity and Reliability

Validity: Validity attempts to determine the accuracy and fidelity of the results derived from the research conducted. It determines whether the research is working towards answering the research questions and fulfilling the research objectives (Saunders *et al*., 2012:157).

Reliability: Reliability refers to whether or not the results of the study are consistent, accurate, replicable and transparent. It is imperative to determine if another researcher can reproduce the same results and observations if they conduct the same study. Data realised must also be clear (Saunders *et al*., 2012:156). According to Saunders *et al*. (2012:157), reliability may be threatened by subject or participant bias, subject or participant error, observer bias, or observer error.

Elimination of Bias

According to Saunders *et al*. (2012:326), it is common for interviewers to be biased but there must be measures in place to stop biasness. Respondent's answers are sometimes affected by the researcher's tone of voice or body actions. Bias in the data collected may result from the respondent's unwillingness to participate due to the in-depth, invasive and somewhat intruding disposition of semi-structured interviews.

Additionally, respondents may omit crucial information (Saunders *et al*., 2012:326). With regards to the study, the researcher informed all respondents of the in-depth questions that would be asked. A pilot study was initially conducted to remove any bias from the questions. The researcher remained objective all through the interview process.

Ethical Considerations

As stated by Sekaran and Bougie (2013:13), the researcher must abide to a range of ethical considerations when conducting the research process.

Ensuring participants have given informed consent: Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2005:95) assert that the researcher is required to adhere to the procedures and information outlined after receiving the consent of the respondent. Additionally, all subjects will be at liberty at any time of the study to exclude themselves. Sufficient information must be provided to potential participants so they can decide whether or not to participate in the interview. With regards to this study, respondents were given a covering letter before the interview process informing them of the reasons for the study. The researcher then made certain that the respondents gave consent to be interviewed.

Ensuring no harm comes to participants: As per protocol the researcher must ensure that no harm is inflicted upon all participants in the study and that all responses from the participants will not be harmful or discredit any persons and will be treated with absolute confidentiality (Watson, McKenna, Cowman and Keady, 2008:131). Regarding this study, the researcher made certain that interviews were carried out in a safe environment and that no harm came to the respondents.

Ensuring confidentiality: Confidentiality in the case of a research study can be defined as the managing of private information by the researcher to protect the participants' identity. Thus when a participant's identity cannot be linked with their personal responses, then anonymity is protected (Fouka and Mantzorou, 2011:6). No names or personal information was recorded by the researcher in any of the data-collection instruments to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents. The researcher alone had access to all the data, results of the study were conveyed in a highly confidential manner and data was stored securely.

Ensuring that permission is obtained: Permission to conduct the study was given by the Regional Head. Furthermore, each respondent gave their permission to be interviewed.

Results

Out of the nine respondents that were chosen from the population, all nine of them were interviewed inferring a 100% response rate. According to Saunders *et al*. (2012:341) a good response rate indicates that the results are accurate, useful and illustrative of the target population. Hence generalisations can be made to the larger population. The modal age range of respondents was 35 – 44 years which accounted for 67% of the sample population. None of the respondents were below the age 35. Most of the respondents were female which accounted for 56% of the sample population and males accounted for 44% of the sample population. The majority of the respondents were White (89%) and the remaining sample of 11% was Indian. 100% of the sample population were educated with all of them attaining tertiary level qualifications. This ensured that respondents were able to read, understand and answer the interview questions in an educationally sound manner. 67% of management agreed that marketing could enhance the quality of education and 83% agreed that marketing could enhance the supply of learner enrolment. 100% of the parents agreed that marketing could enhance the quality of education and the supply of learner enrolment. From the results obtained, it was evident that parents viewed school marketing as an essential activity. However, not all of management saw the purpose of school marketing which could have been a

contributing factor to the group's lack of a competitive advantage. 67% of the parents responded that their school did not actively participate in marketing efforts. A reason for management not actively participating in marketing efforts was the limited marketing budget. It was evident from the results that the lack of active marketing participation was school-specific, most parents were despondent about the marketing efforts being made by their school and that some management did not actively participate in marketing efforts due to budget constraints. A question posed to discover reasons from management on why there was a lack of formal marketing strategies and to assess parents' stance on the current marketing strategy found that 67% of managers believed that there was formal marketing strategies while 67% of the parents responded that there was a lack of formal marketing strategies. It was apparent that the presence of formal marketing strategies was school-specific with some conflicting responses in one particular school from the group. The latter could have been due to the development of a proposed formal marketing strategy from Head Office in recent months called Game Changers which focused on identifying and marketing the positive elements of a school. The more established school had formal marketing strategies in place and was proactive in marketing their new campus. Reasons for a lack of formal marketing strategies included: budget constraints; no need for marketing as learner enrolment was high; a lack of leadership; the wide ranging geographical locations of the schools; ineffective spending of the marketing budget; and poor communication from the top down. 100% of the respondents answered that parents were the crucial stakeholders of the group; followed by learners (56%), the community (33%), investors (22%), shareholders (22%), teachers (22%), directors (11%) and business partners (11%). 44% of the respondents mentioned "parents" and "staff" being aware of the marketing strategies; 56% of the respondents made mention of the "executive head" and "marketing manager"; and 11% of the respondents mentioned the "learners", "head office" and "phase heads" as being aware of the marketing strategies. The responses revealed that the schools' marketing drives were to: offer better facilities, better school layout and more safety to learners; be more cost effective; advertise strategically; and be more proactive with technology compared to its competitors. 44% of the responses were "No", 33% of the responses were "Yes" and 22% of the responses were "Yes and no" to whether the current marketing strategies elicited a competitive advantage over other private schools. Parents mainly responded "No". Competitive factors included: unique offerings, holistic development of learners, positive word-of-mouth, concentration on STEM, strong branding, 21st century skills, proactive, pioneers, empowering staff, retaining staff, cheaper fees and good infrastructure. Non-competitive factors included: high fees, little marketing effort, latecomer disadvantage, not competitive offerings, mainly focused on word-of-mouth, lack of facilities, future returns on school location, and poor communication. Some respondents discussed the Game Changer strategy that was still in its infancy and its success was proposed. The results suggested that the lack of a competitive advantage was school-specific. Most parents thought that the current marketing strategies did not elicit a competitive advantage over other private schools. Reasons for a lack of a competitive advantage were all related to the elements of the marketing mix. The marketing mix elements are chosen according to the marketing strategy plan and the competitive positioning of the firm. Competitive positioning involves an organisation deploying assets and competencies strategically to serve target markets more efficiently than its competitors. The question to explain the exodus of learners and to identify the factors that enhanced learner enrolment revealed some of the emerging themes were school-specific whilst most of the themes were reflected across the three schools. There was an equal number positive factors influencing learner enrolment and negative factors influencing learner exodus. One school in the group is an English and Afrikaans median school and as Ballito has a large Afrikaans community, this was a positive factor of learner enrolment.

Recommendations

79% of the respondents gave recommendations to improve the competitiveness of the school's marketing strategies while 22% of the respondents believed that the current marketing strategy of their school did not need to improve. Furthermore, it was recommended that the school's marketing strategy needed to conduct a competitor analysis more effectively to better target their market and to attract untapped market segments. One of the respondents recommended that the group should promote the critical success factors more in

their marketing strategy. Other recommendations were: advertising on radio stations, in newspapers and at malls, having more brand recognition, promoting the school through niching using attributes such as co-educational schooling and a Christian ethos, increasing the marketing budget. Most of these recommendations to improve the competitiveness of the schools' marketing strategies formed part of the Seven P's of the marketing mix. Ehlers and Lazenby (2010:85) asserted that existing competitors in education determine the price, quantity and quality of a school's offerings. Therefore a school's marketing strategy can be developed from continually monitoring the competition. Critical success factors in the context of the educational sector allow for private schools to accomplish their stated objectives and facilitate for their competitive performance in the industry (Olszak and Ziemba, 2012:132). According to Losike-Sedimo (2011:42), it is the people who necessitate an organisation's competitive advantage. Therefore highly qualified educators need to be recruited, educators' worth needs to be acknowledged and praised and there needs to be continuous training and development of educators.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The mass exodus of learners from the group was a pressing issue and due to them owning the largest proportion of private schools in South Africa, developing a marketing strategy to curb this occurrence was a critical endeavour for the private schooling sector in South Africa. The research questions were answered by the content that the findings of the primary research provided. The discussions below related the findings of the primary research to the research questions. The findings of the study suggested that the lack of a competitive marketing strategy of the group was school-specific. The findings also identified the factors contributing to the lack of a competitive marketing strategy as being: a lack of reactiveness from schools and school members in marketing efforts, poor communication to all stakeholders, centralisation of marketing information to top management, poor distribution of the marketing message from head office, budget constraints, location constraints, the vast amount of competitors with better offerings in the area and the school's poor positioning in the marketplace. The implied critical success factors that influenced parents' or guardians' selection of the group was their curriculum and Capital Investment into each school. The parents' perspective on the current marketing efforts was again school-specific. The dissatisfaction of parents was owed to a lack of reactiveness of the school in marketing efforts, unqualified and indifferent educators, poor leadership, inadequate service and product offerings, ineffective, and uncompetitive marketing mix elements, there being a lack of critical success factors and the clients' needs and wants not being satisfied.

Recommendations

People: Management should support and assist educators in achieving their goals as this would make educators feel more appreciated and would enhance their job satisfaction. Management should offer support to all employees of the school to promote their enthusiasm and confidence in their profession. Management should be aware of all educators' work ethic through conducting performance appraisals to encourage educators' accountability and responsibility (Barau and Neog, 2014:307). The aforementioned endeavours could reduce educators' absenteeism, turnover and indifferent attitude towards their work. Management should be transparent with their clients and employees in terms of changes, decision making and the school's marketing strategy as this would persuade all parties to cohesively achieve the objectives of the school (Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler, 2013:420). This can be achieved with effective communication between all parties to eradicate misconceptions and clients' cognitive dissonance (Kotler, Armstrong and Tait, 2010:164). Management should promote teamwork and comradeship by getting educators, staff and clients involved in the decision making process regarding the school as this would propagate positive word-of-mouth (Losike-Sedimo, 2011:42). Overall, management should strive for effective leadership by leading by example to accentuate the marketing strategy's success (Ireland, Hoskisson and Hitt, 2009:385). As educators are the service providers and are in direct contact with the school's clients, internal marketing is essential (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011:74). Educators need to be clear

on the objectives of the school and should accurately inform clients of any subject matter that directly affects the clients. Educators should be involved in the curriculum development such that the group would be able to accurately determine the feasibility of the proposed developments. Educators should be knowledgeable and should develop quality education for all learners by attending group and IEB workshops, studying further and familiarising themselves with technological advancements in education. These can be accomplished by offering educators incentives to study further such as education subsidies, bursaries and verbal motivation (Yaacob, Osman and Bachok, 2012:246). Educators' basic salary should be aligned with other private schools salary structure to prevent their transfer to other schools. More benefits such as company contribution to medical aid, pension fund and performance bonuses should be administered. Performance bonuses should be aligned with educators' performance appraisals. The school should also provide bursaries to educators' children such that educators are made aware that the school values their employment and acknowledges their personal life. Safe parking should be provided for educators such that their personal belongings are not tampered with. Clients' needs and wants have to be tended to by the school such that they feel like they are getting value for their money (Malherbe, 2004:6). This can be accomplished by management providing a virtual and physical forum for clients to be vocal about their grievances and suggestions. Additionally, surveys can be conducted to assess the needs and wants of clients. Management should implement a computerised customer relationship management such that clients' needs are facilitated for prior to and after the enrolment of their child at the school. This will reduce negative word-of-mouth and will restore clients' faith in the school (Malherbe, 2004:18). All stakeholders should be included in the development of the school's marketing strategy such that all parties are informed about the amount of effort going into the progression of the school (Mashau, Kone and Mutshaeni, 2014:560). The group's head office should not exist in isolation but needs to make frequent visits to all schools in the group to promote effective communication and dissemination of information. This will ensure that the objectives of the group as a whole are realised and that all parties work in unison to accomplish their goals.

Product/Service: More valuable supplementary services need to be included in the service offerings of the school (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011:35) to allow schools to gain a competitive advantage by differentiation despite their location constraints. Supplementary services can include subjects not offered by other private schools such as Advanced Program Mathematics, Maritime Studies, Travel and Tourism, Hotel and Catering, Cosmetology and Fashion Design to name but a few. After school tuition should be free of charge, along with aftercare services. Scholarships should be offered to exceptional learners to promote the enrolment of high quality learners into the school and to prevent the exodus of these learners from the school. Additionally, higher education bursaries should be awarded to learners who demonstrate sporting or academic excellence. Whilst buildings cannot be extended, the current facilities need to be upgraded and should include technologically advanced equipment to assure parents that they are receiving value for their money. The Wi-Fi connection has to perform optimally by outsourcing technically specialists as parents are paying for Wi-Fi services monthly. Again, high quality educators and sport coaches need to be recruited and retained in the school such that the school can compete on academics and sport. Guidance counsellors need to be employed to ensure learners' mental well-being and should assist learners in career planning.

Price: As two schools in the group cannot compete academically and one school cannot compete from a facilities perspective, their school fees should be structured such that it reduces in higher grades to prevent the exodus of learners from the school. Schools should offer discounts for early payment of fees and should charge interest to late payment of fees to reduce bad debts. Discounts can also be awarded to parents with more than one child enrolled at the school. One school should employ a low-cost focus strategy until headway is made with the promised infrastructure. This will afford parents with good quality private education in a loving environment with relatively small classes at a reduced cost which will afford one school with a competitive advantage. Budgets that are constrained in all schools can be compensated with aggressive fundraising and acquired donations from the community and businesses (Losike-Sedimo, 2011:39). Schools have to form good relationships with all stakeholders to necessitate this (Mashau *et al.*, 2014:561).

Place: One school needs to place more pressure on municipality to allow them to extend their premises. In the event of the municipality not budging, they need to consider relocating to a safer premises with multiple access routes and sufficient space for future developments.

Promotion: As promotion serves as an avenue for communication to parents and stakeholders, greater effort needs to be placed in promotion. More time and money needs to be spent on promotion to make the public more aware of the group, their offerings and learners' achievements. More emphasis needs to be placed on promoting what the group does that is unique and exceptional such as the robotics, the outdoor program, the problem solving based mathematics curriculum, the 21st century teaching and learning and the small number of students per class. Public advertising via social media, newspapers, radio stations, fliers, community events and stickers on cars can ensure this. A school prospectus, expos, brochures, positive word-of-mouth and public relations can also assist in informing the community of the group and increasing their exposure. Newsletters and emails with upcoming events of the school and achievements of past learners can be issued to parents to get their support and interaction into the school. More community outreach programs, interschool sporting and academic events and visits to feeder schools need to be executed to promote the group. In light of the Mathematics Core results for the matriculants of 2015, one school achieved an average higher than that of most IEB schools in South Africa and a Mathematical Literacy learner achieved in the top one percent of IEB schools in South Africa. However, this information was not made public which could have enhanced the enrolment of learners into the school. The information of the marketing strategy needs to be decentralised which can be facilitated for by frequent and routine meetings with respective parties and through the vigorous use of emailing and the group's intranet which has features such as video calling, texting and multimedia messaging.

Physical evidence: Facilities of the one school need to be upgraded, signage of the high school campus needs to be clearly visible, the website needs to be constantly updated, learners need to be neatly attired in school uniform at all times, learners also need to use bags with school logos and the sport coaches and sport teams need to wear crested kits to all practices and interschool games to enhance the branding of the group. The reception area of the school and the gardens should have aesthetic value. More security measures should be taken and a new armed response security company should be outsourced to assure parents, learners and staff of their safety. Report cards should be accurate, have the school logo and should be delivered to parents on time (Vigar-Ellis, 2013:12).

Processes: The group has to conduct performance appraisals and require training and development of educators to ensure that educators deliver high quality services, employ 21st century teaching and are passionate about their job (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011:197). Mentors and subject heads can be in place to provide support to new educators (Yaacob *et al*., 2010:250). A reward system should be developed for educators who provide service excellence and repercussions for excessive absenteeism and unprofessionalism should be passed down (Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown, 2012:73). To emphasise the family and Christian ethos of the schools, assemblies should be supplemented with prayers, scripture readings and motivational talks to help learners develop life skills. Systems for monitoring competitors marketing strategies should be implemented so that the group can target their market more effectively and attract untapped market segments. Systems to necessitate CRM need to be set up to effectively target and satisfying clients' needs and wants (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011:110). As the budget was constrained by bad debts and reckless supply expenditure, a more efficient payment system and Supply Chain Management processes need be developed.

Areas for Further Research

- A larger sample size could be employed to elicit a more comprehensive understanding of the population.
- A more comprehensive study of all provinces in South Africa could be pursued.

- Further research could investigate the marketing strategies of private colleges and universities in South Africa along with the critical success factors of these institutions.

Due to promotion, communication and location having a major impact on the competitiveness of the current marketing strategies in these schools, a study evaluating the effective implementation of these factors in the group should be conducted. This would afford researchers with an all-inclusive comprehension of the subject which will provide an opportunity to further develop this research topic. It could therefore be concluded that it was feasible to develop a marketing strategy for the group in KwaZulu-Natal but that it required a school-wide effort with all stakeholders involved to align the marketing mix elements with the needs and wants of the parents, to highlight the critical success factors of the schools and to restore or create a positive image of the school to all stakeholders.

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