

Benefits of a Content Multi-Purposing Model

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INTRODUCTION

The intent of action is the achievement of something decisive. Within any business, decisiveness is hopefully linked to the successful generation of revenue due to the right product being introduced to the right market at the right time. The challenge is to ensure that once a product is released to the market, that the most revenue possible can be earned. In the case of higher education, one potential product is distance education offerings that provide learning opportunities to students who cannot participate in traditional education. The development of distance educational materials for online use, however, can be costly, and subsequent revenue streams may generate little or no revenue, which occurs with many distance education programs. This can be resolved, however, by the strategic re-purposing of online course materials that may have been developed for distance education.

This article will identify the benefits of maximizing the return on investment for distance education offerings through the appropriate and timely re-purposing of the online content for different markets. The full model, entitled “Transformative Income Generation” and presented by the author within *Distance Learning and University Effectiveness: Changing Educational Paradigms for Online Learning* (2004), is based upon content re-purposing with an understanding of the various potential markets.

THE MODEL: TRANSFORMATIVE INCOME GENERATION

Maximizing the return on investment for distance education offerings is possible by evaluating the content in hand, how it is being used in its current form, and if it can be utilized in other ways so that the cost to create online content can be spread over a variety of markets. Designing, creating, and releasing content for one purpose to one market is cost ineffec-

tive unless that institution has command over a large portion of the market.

Applying the Transformative Income Generation (TIG) model is one way to refute the assumption that the only way to increase revenue via online distance education courses is to increase class sizes. The goal is to optimize the return on investment for distance education offerings by analyzing existing or new content and determining the cost effectiveness of re-purposing it to pre-determined markets with a high chance for financial success.

The six steps of the TIG model are presented in Figure 1 and begin with the *Internal Audit*. The *Internal Audit* is the first step to determining what is taught online via distance education, what is taught online onsite, and what is not taught online or uses limited technology. This is a key step towards understanding what is available within the institution for potential re-purposing.

Step two, the *Audit Analysis*, is the review of the Internal Audit data to determine what material can be easily re-purposed, as well as the possible market potential for those materials. For example, a distance education course in pharmacology could be re-purposed easier than a course not taught online in anatomy and physiology. It is also important to remember that the re-purposing of materials is not always to the same level for which the materials were prepared, so material originally presented in courses might be re-purposed to not only online courses, but also to continuing education or even as supplemental library resources if it were constructed a certain way. This is not the time to conduct a market analysis; that comes later.

Step three, the *Market Stratification*, is when the market potential is considered and thought is given to how to re-purpose the educational material. This involves considering potential markets that can be both business-to-consumer (students, adult learners, continuing education, etc.) as well as business-to-business (other colleges and universities, libraries,

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corporations, etc.). This is where thinking outside of the box becomes extremely important so no possible market is overlooked.

The fourth step, *Analyzing the Market*, takes place after the brainstorming of the Market Stratification step has been completed. This is when entrepreneurial considerations are put to the litmus test in terms of the chance for success or failure. Entrepreneurial opportunities should be undertaken when the risk can be minimized, which can only be done when the marketplace is appropriately analyzed. Appropriate market research using personal contacts, literature review, and other conventional means should be used to assess market opportunities.

After Analyzing the Market is completed, careful thought should be given regarding the possible implementation of an entrepreneurial endeavor. This occurs in step five, *Implementation Considerations*, when the evaluation of business-to-consumer or business-to-business opportunities are considered in light of the impact it may have on the institution. For example, within a business-to-consumer model, it may be necessary to register students for courses prior to collecting tuition, but within a business-to-business model, the content is brokered to another institution that registered students, so the considerations for the provision of content are now different. Lastly, an important *Implementation Consideration* is the determination of whether it is beneficial to be entrepreneurial. If the rewards of the innovation do not benefit

those involved, then an entrepreneurial venture could actually be a disincentive to getting involved.

The sixth and final step in the process, *Marketing the Program*, is the promotion of the materials you are trying to re-purpose. Many institutions of higher education still espouse to the belief that if they build it, someone will buy it. This is unfortunately not the case, and a good marketing plan is just as instrumental to success as the development of high-quality materials. The reason for the dashed line between *Marketing the Program* and the Internal Audit or Audit Analysis is that the marketing of offerings may generate awareness to other possible markets.

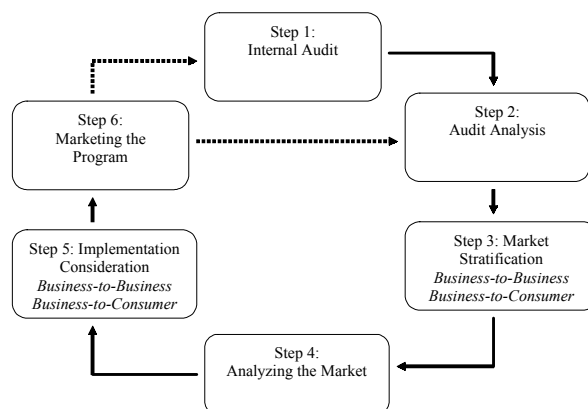
BENEFITS OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE INCOME GENERATION MODEL

When one considers the amount of resources necessary to develop and deliver online distance education, it is logical that every opportunity for an institution to capitalize on its investment be considered. In essence you are looking for as many ways as possible to offset production costs and maximize your return on investment. The author would argue that most institutions of higher education are content with one, maybe two ways to use content. The most obvious constraint is the academic system itself and the reluctance to embrace the “knowledge as commodity” concept.

One benefit of the TIG model is how existing or developed content is re-purposed into other markets to make the most efficient use of the content by spreading the developmental costs over the largest possible number of users. It cannot be accomplished via conservative thinking, but instead requires out-of-the-box thinking by not emulating your competition, but instead focusing on areas that they have not. Within the TIG model, courses or content are a “commodity” that can be sold within both business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) contexts, and is about capitalizing on the value of e-content to the largest possible audience.

Consider the following dilemma. Should a college or university develop online content and commit resources to a distance education program supporting 300 to 500 students with the hope that the technology

Figure 1. Steps within the Transformative Income Generation model



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