



Book

Leading the Learning Revolution

The Expert's Guide to Capitalizing on the Exploding Lifelong Education Market

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Solid marketing principles also apply to promoting online education.

Recommendation

E-learning expert Jeff Cobb details how to plan, develop and promote a profitable Internet curriculum for adult learners. This expert, comprehensive guide covers how to sell learning products and services online, how to use a variety of web tools to conduct market research, and how to vend almost any products and services via the Internet. Leaving no aspect of monetizing online education uncovered, Cobb also explains overall Internet marketing more effectively than most specialized sales guides. *getAbstract* recommends his knowledgeable, accessible manual to anyone who is seeking to sell products or services online – educational or otherwise.

In this summary, you will learn

- What new online opportunities await entrepreneurs in the field of education
- How to capitalize on these opportunities by establishing a niche, targeting prospects, offering long-term value and forming lasting relationships

Take-Aways

- Advances in technology make it relatively inexpensive to provide for-profit adult learning – outside of a classroom – worldwide.
- Entrepreneurial educators use the Internet to sell and present their courses.
- Educators must establish niches for their offerings, target appropriate prospects, offer long-term value and form lasting relationships.
- Product differentiation and competitive pricing challenge online educators.
- Online educational companies need a well-conceived business model with a strong value proposition.
- Web-education models include the “purpose × passion” basic course, introducing your programming with free content, virtual conferences and mass audience lectures.
- The potential market is vast: More than 70% of professional and trade associations offer continuing education courses online.
- Target prospects who can become your lifelong re-education customers.

- Always remind your clients exactly how the knowledge you offer benefits their lives.
- A good email list is the best tool for marketing educational products and services.

Summary

“Learning providers must be prepared to take some risks, make some leaps, to lead their learners to new and better places.”

“Even as unemployment surges, businesses are having a difficult time finding people with the types and levels of talents they need for open positions.”

“Nearly anyone with a decent computer, a high-speed Internet connection and expertise or access to expertise in a topic or skill set can reach a global audience in very sophisticated ways.”

“Knowledge Economy”

Change is the one reliable constant in today’s knowledge economy. The nature of work is in a perpetual state of rapid transformation. Working people must keep acquiring both new information and expertise continually to stay competitive and employable. This is as true for creative leaders whose work demands solid critical thinking as it is for all of their employees.

Contemporary industry will bypass those who fall out of date, but perpetual self-improvement requires a high degree of self-discipline and self-directedness. All workers must assume personal responsibility for enhancing their skills and developing their education. As everyone acknowledges and adjusts to the knowledge economy, it is mutating into a “learning economy.”

Anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can connect with and instruct people across the globe. Advances in technology – such as “low-cost, reliable web conferencing technologies” – make it feasible and relatively inexpensive to provide for-profit adult learning outside of a classroom. Corporate training departments now commonly offer e-learning. More than 70% of professional and trade associations now also offer some continuing education courses online.

Worthy Models

Using basic web and video tools, hedge fund manager Salman Khan has produced more than 2,000 videos and has provided students with almost 150 million lessons. The founder of the Khan Academy, he started out in education intending only to teach his cousin. Today, teachers’ and students’ loyalty to Kahn’s educational materials testifies to their value. He embodies the two personal traits necessary to succeed as a specialized learning provider: ample expertise and a robust entrepreneurial spirit.

Stephen Downes and George Siemens initiated a “massive open online course” (MOOC), offering presentations incorporating “blogs, wikis, email and an open-source learning management system.” Thousands of people worldwide participated in the MOOC, the first of many of large-scale online activities staged by Downes and Siemens.

Multiplayer games also can become educational experiences. The Institute for the Future supervises various “serious games,” in which participants compete to develop intellectual solutions to pressing world problems such as global poverty. According to the Institute, this form of massive online participation promotes social learning.

When learning on the Internet, online students engage with their instructors and with each other via chat, “multiway video” and discussion boards. By providing commentary, online students also teach one another. Online instruction has become an accepted, expected staple at major colleges and universities. The renowned and respected Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) conference recently premiered TED-Ed (<http://education.ted.com>), a special educational website.

“You are much more likely to keep people’s interest and build a long-term relationship with them if you are helping them rather than overtly selling to them.”

“Millions of adults are going online each day and finding free content that meets specific learning needs.”

“If you are an excellent teacher...you have the makings of an excellent marketer, and vice versa.”

“An AdWord ad is like a very concise, miniature landing page.”

“Technology...has so far had the most visible, obvious impact on how we perceive learning and education.”

Your Market

Send online promotions for your educational product only to those who might become profitable long-term customers. Focus on the niche audience that wants your specialized expertise. Establishing a sustainable, long-term client base requires approximately 1,000 customers who become “true fans” – those who buy anything you produce, because they expect your materials to promote and sustain their professional growth. Securing the 1,000 customers who become your loyal following requires an initial prospect base of 50,000 to 100,000 individuals.

Perform simple Google key word searches that are relevant to your prospective educational products. For example, if you plan to teach entrepreneurs about cash flow, search “small business cash flow.” Seek related Google ads and YouTube videos. Use Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Set up a Google Alerts feed that gathers online information aligned to your search. To define your audience, use SocialMention as a social media search tool and SurveyMonkey to complete online surveys.

Once you have an idea of your target market, place a test ad on Google. Start out with a “minimum viable product.” Develop an “‘always in beta’ mentality” about product development. Don’t invest a lot of time and money developing your educational products until you have a solid base of prospects – a “minimal viable audience.”

For online marketing, offer a solid customer incentive on your website’s landing page, which should also feature a call to action. Buy an appropriate email list for your marketing. MailChimp provides free lists of up to 2,000 names. Constant Contact is another popular email list vendor. Your marketing research activities can be summed up as: “listening, asking and testing.”

Business Models

Select a sound business model for your educational products and services enterprise. Your model should cover various options for creating and sustaining revenue. Popular business models for educational enterprises include:

- **“The P² community model”** – Use this model to teach basic skills that always need updating. P² stands for “purpose × passion,” the base prime for educational activity with ongoing renewals. Your online community needs both purpose and passion in order to coalesce. Take the A-List Blogging Bootcamp established by Leo Babauta. It offers an Internet course that teaches people how to become power bloggers. Another is the Sci-Mind initiative, which incorporates “self-paced learning content” supplemented by expert assistance and peer-to-peer learning.
- **“The flipped model”** – Educational entrepreneurs use this model to offer valuable free educational content to establish their subject expertise before they attempt to charge for their educational products. This model enables you to establish strong brand awareness and develop client loyalty before you sell.
- **“The virtual conference model”** – This model utilizes advanced webinar or webcast programming that enables learners to attend educational conferences through the Internet in their homes or offices. Some organizations sponsoring conventional educational conferences worry that virtual conferences will gut their customer attendance numbers, but marketplace experience does not support this concern.
- **“The massive model”** – Use this Internet-based model to communicate from your computer to millions of people across the planet at virtually no cost. Educators today can reach 10,000 people as easily as they can access a classroom of 20 students. “Massive learning experiences” involve educational content assembled by experts and presented over the Internet to vast numbers of students. These learning experiences are collaborative, as students naturally form their own commentary groups.

Differentiation

The plethora of free information on the Internet makes competing as a cyberspace educational service difficult. To avoid cutting your prices, develop a brand that clients want. An online educator's product differentiation requires you to:

"It is rare for organizations that offer lifelong learning opportunities to actually measure whether learning has happened, and whether knowledge and skills have been retained."

"Game play on a large scale is one of the most effective mechanisms we have for broad societal learning and change."

"There is and will continue to be a lack off sufficiently educated people entering the US economy in the foreseeable future."

"As you consider your market, don't think in terms of transactions; think in terms of relationships."

- **Be distinctive** – Generate unique content or package familiar content in a new way.
- **Be "memorable"** – Do something your students will never forget.
- **Generate buzz** – Get people to talk about you.
- **"Exploit your strengths"** – Identify what you do best. Have an outsider give you an objective appraisal.
- **"Redefine your market"** – Imbue your product with your personality; make sure your prospects know that your work springs from your heart and is unique.
- **"Set the standard"** – Learn from the example of the Project Management Institute, which became known as the gold standard for project management through its professional certification program. TED achieved similar stature by holding "creativity, design and innovation" conferences.
- **"Be contrarian"** – Most software firms constantly introduce new features. In contrast, 37signals succeeds with only a few software products offering minimal features. Don't try to be all things to all clients. Develop and be proud of your niche.
- **"Create a story"** – Starbucks successfully established a flattering story about its customers, portraying them as sophisticated people who understand the value of an elegant "European-style coffee experience." Frame your offerings so your clients feel as if they are part of a special community.
- **"Imitate strategically"** – Successful firms often copycat, patterning their products and image after the designs of originating companies.
- **"Adapt creatively"** – Gary Vaynerchuk built his family's liquor business from \$4 million to \$60 million-plus per year by creating Wine Library TV. He developed a loyal following for this online educational venture showcasing his wine expertise.

Work from specific learning objectives, such as, how to use your firm's financial reports and files to "identify and document potential revenue recognition problems." Combine the right objectives with sound instruction to give your clients what they want and need. Help them understand how the knowledge you offer benefits them. Edit your instructional materials down to their minimal essence. Repeat the most basic, crucial information over and over. Segment your material into memorable chunks. Use multimedia – videos, cartoons, animated graphics, photographs and music. Actively involve your students by providing "checklists, worksheets and other tools."

Sophisticated tools available for creating online learning materials include WordPress for blogging and Adobe Fireworks for image editing. For online video, purchase a digital video camera with audio capabilities. Set up a separate digital audio recorder to capture sound. The Jing tool from TechSmith excels at "screen casting" – capturing what appears on your computer screen. Work with a single platform that can handle your webinars and webcasts. Great "rapid course creation tools" include TechSmith's Camtasia and Articulate's Rapid E-Learning Studio. Your clients must be able to access your materials from your website; WordPress also works well as your online platform for this purpose. Choose a high-quality learning management system that provides advanced credit and integration options. No matter which tools you employ to develop your educational content, maintain full editorial control.

“Convenience and relevance ... have now become much more central to the value proposition of educational products and services than they have ever been before.”

Most learning takes place informally. To stay uppermost in the minds of your true fans, especially between online learning sessions, reach out to them through your educational content, such as blogs, surveys, pop quizzes and such. Use email to stay in touch with your learning clients and to promote your products. The well-known AIDA formula – “attention, interest, desire and action” – applies as much to the marketing of educational products as to any product category.

Your goal as an online educator is to make a positive and lasting impact on your clients’ lives and work. Use such products as the Mozilla Open Badges project to test whether your clients learn the lessons of your online courses. Adapt your materials to ensure that they do.

Develop a “Learning Platform”

Develop long-term relationships with your clientele. Provide them with opportunities for meaningful change “in knowledge, in skills, in behavior.” To build a long-term clientele, create a learning platform for your prospects. Your learning platform provides the basis for building client trust.

“It is simply hard to beat the convenience of staying in your office or at home while still getting access to great content and interaction with peers.”

Learn who your students are. Engage and empower them so your educational offerings become an essential component of their lives. Become a change agent – and a learning leader – for your online community. When that happens, you exemplify the essence of social learning and your company will thrive.

About the Author

Jeff Cobb, founder of Tagoras – a consulting firm specializing in continuing education – was co-founder and CEO of the e-learning organization Isoph and senior vice president of Quisic.

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