

MARKETING ANALYSIS OF DISTANCE LEARNING IN COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING AND INFORMATION SCIENCE STUDIES FOR ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEES

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In these article results of the marketing research in Siberian State University of Telecommunications and Information sciences are given. Research task was to reveal causes of consumers' behavior on the distance learning services market, understanding the nature of this behavior, definition of distance learning advancement effective channels and of ways of motivation of potential consumers by means of marketing communications.

Keywords: distance learning, distance learning consumers, motivation of consumers, marketing communication

The main objects of research in the marketing of educational services are [1, 6-8]:

- The surrounding marketing environment, market borders and segments, tendencies of quantitative parameter change of supply and demand for educational services in the given market or in its segment.
- Competitive capacity of educational services in the given market.
- Partner-institutions, both real and potential consumers and competitors acting in the market of an educational institution.
- Possible marketing strategies, different variants of tactical decisions of concrete marketing problems.

Market segmentation is the first step of studying the market, the ground for the definition of market capacity and the choice of priority incidence of marketing activity. Market segmentation allows specifying and differ-

entiating a demand, to structure it and reveal the most suitable conditions (borders of the incidence) for choosing an optimal marketing strategy and tactics.

Segmentation of distance learning trainees allows to evaluate an appeal of each segment by its sizes and to choose marketing strategy for each segment.

Distance learning via the Internet becomes more and more appealing. The Siberian State University of Telecommunications and Information Sciences (SibSUTIS) has been using distance learning technologies for higher education services almost about 10 years [2-5]. The number of students studying by distance is steadily increasing. It is illustrated by the diagram on Fig. 1 where the dynamics of student enrollment in distance learning courses since 2000 to 2010 year is shown.

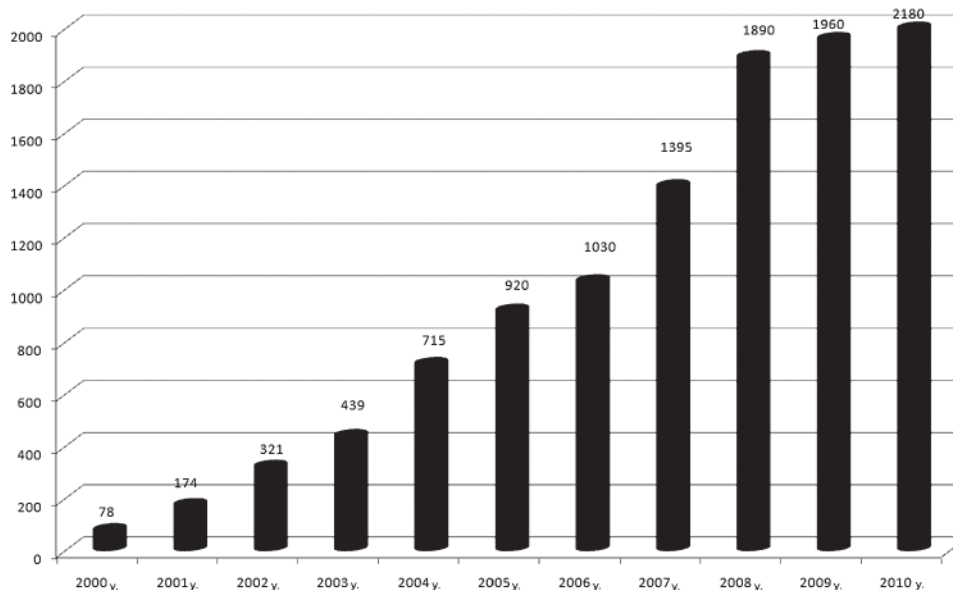


Fig. 1. Dynamics of students' enrollment in distance learning

Trainees have quickly estimated advantages of such kind of training. It is especially convenient for working people, the majority among «distance» trainees. All the materials necessary for training (the theoretical material, laboratory and practical classes) are on the website of the university where trainees login from their computers. They communicate with teachers by e-mail, leaving for the university only at the end of training to take graduation examinations and defend degree thesis.

Today more than 2000 employees from the Russian telecommunication and information technology companies are trained at the university.

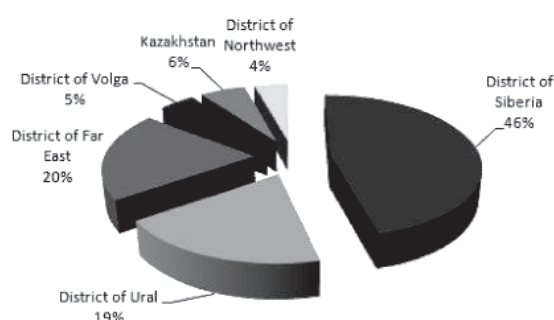


Fig. 2. Classification of DL students by geographical location

Social demographic portrait of dl students

On the basis of the database of distance learning the market segmentation of SibSUTIS Internet-training on groups of consumers has been made. Classification of distance learning trainees has been made by following criteria:

- Geographical (region of trainees' residing, type of settlement).
- Socially-demographic (age, sex, educational level, occupation and its connection with the specialties obtained by distance learning at SibSUTIS).
- Affiliation to the various telecommunication enterprises.

The research has shown, that in general the consumers of distance learning services at SibSUTIS are citizens of Siberian, Ural and Far East districts (Fig. 2) because they are better informed about availability of distance learning in SibSUTIS than citizens of other districts. In turn, their informativity is caused by the geographical position of SibSUTIS. Many of them are graduates from SibSUTIS, the majority works in telecommunication enterprises. It is interesting, that the share of trainees from administrative centers is approximately equal to the share of trainees from countryside (Fig. 3). It is explained by the availability of the given form of training to the population of remote areas.



Fig. 3. Market segmentation by types of settlements

The analysis of segmentation by demographic criteria has discovered that men have more needs for distance learning in comparison to women. So there were 50% of men and 40% of women among the applicants for distance learning in 2009. The same tendency was shown in previous years.

The reasons of such gender deformation originate from economic reforms taking place in telecommunication industry. Telecommunication companies and corporations incorporated into a big Russian holding were set a task to make the industry more attractive for investments, to increase capitalization by means of outsourcing and efficient use of company staff. Both of these means involve dismissing of many people. Historically established that in telecommunication companies men used to occupy more senior positions than women and therefore change of managers and specialists with obsolete store of knowledge has applied mostly to men than to women. Hence they have a motive to be enriched with modern knowledge and data by distance learning.

Segmentation by demographic criteria has shown, that the main consumers of distance learning services are people at the age from 30 to 39 years (41%), and also young men at the age under 30 years (36%). However there is a more senior age category – from 40 to 49 years (21%) and even trainees at the age of 50 to 60 years continue their education.

In this connection, marketing study assumes studying of consumer preferences, the object of research is market segmentation by the specialties offered, connected with a profession (Fig. 4).

Distance learning trainees have a different social status and a professional level. The heads of average and top staff, employees of the economic sector (economists, bookkeepers, sales managers) are interested in economic education. Technical officers and representatives of working professions (electricians, electromechanics), prefer to obtain education in technical specialties.



Fig. 4. Market segmentation by professions

Most of distance learning trainees are technical and engineering employees. They wish to update the knowledge received many years ago, or to raise their education level after graduation from a technical school and a college. Behind them there are the heads who, as a rule do not

have modern economic knowledge needed for the division management in the conditions of competitive service market.

As basically the consumers of the Internet-education services are people employed, the segmentation by the enterprises and organizations, which they work in, is of great interest.

The majority of them are employees of such large telecommunication companies, as «Sibirtelecom» and «Uralsvyazinform». It is clear as they are better informed about availability of a new form of training at their «home» university. However in the process of the information circulation to the West and East of the country, the employees of other telecommunication companies – «Dalsvyaz», «Southern telecommunication company», «the Northwest Telecom» and others start pinning their hopes with obtaining the education via Internet (Fig. 5).

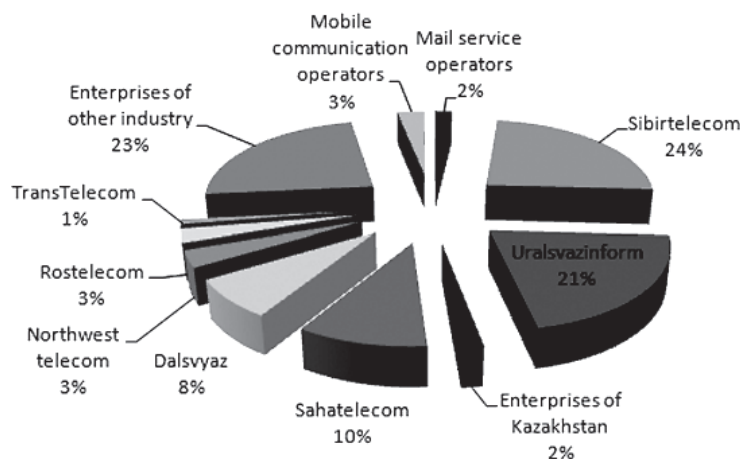


Fig. 5. Market segmentation by telecommunication enterprises

Motives analysis to choose dl

If speaking about main motives which prompt employees from telecommunication industry to apply for distance learning, the analysis revealed an opportunity of a career development and consequently an increase of incomes after obtaining supplementary education.

The market of distance learning differs from the market of traditional face-to-face learning. On the one part distance learning has not gained necessary confidence of the majority of telecom employees. On the other part they note definite advantages of using Internet technologies in learning: study while at work, remain in one location with no need to travel; plan own training. The studies carried out among trainees in SibSUTIS have demonstrated that the majority of trainees (93,2%) find distance learning interesting and not less valuable than traditional learning. 74,4% of

trainees from telecommunication industry are fully satisfied with distance learning and have no doubts about choosing this format of learning. 97% of trainees are going to complete a full course of distance learning program and get a degree (though, unfortunately, not everyone can realize it in practice. 74% of trainees would chose distance learning again (if they were to make a choice).

The motives to choose distance learning with use of the Internet channels are of interest. For this reason the telecom employees enrolled for the distance learning course in SibSUTIS have been questioned. The questionnaire has demonstrated that 47% of respondents chose distance learning because of its advantages, i.e. they are already motivated to learning via Internet; 29% of respondents followed advice of friends or those who already study via Internet or company management to which it is profitable to keep employees at their working places;

19% of respondents have been influenced by prestige of SibSUTIS.

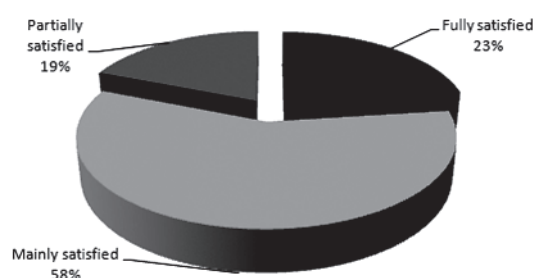


Fig. 6. Assessment of general satisfaction of distance learning

Fig. 6 demonstrates the assessment of general satisfaction of the students, who are graduating, with the distance learning course. 23% of graduating students are fully satisfied; 58% of graduating students are mainly satisfied and only 19% of graduating students are partially satisfied with the distance learning course. It is necessary to notice that there has been no unsatisfied graduating student this year as well as previous years.

Conclusion

The prospects of development of the considered market segments and marketing strategy concerning these segments have been defined by the results of the research being carried out.

One of the primary strategies is still a strategy of strengthening the positions in already developed corporate markets. This strategy includes the following actions:

- Carrying out of the large-scale advertising companies in corporate mass media (publications of «Uralsvyazinform», «Sibirtelecom» and etc.).
- Further image improvement of SibSUTIS and the Inter-regional training center of retrain-

ing of experts as its division, which provides the Internet-training services.

- Strengthening positions in poor developed markets (operator of post, mobile communications and so forth).

- Constant quality improvement of distance learning services.

The second marketing strategy is the strategy of «capture» of new markets. Here the efforts will be put forth to:

- Penetration into the corporate markets of the CIS countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, etc.).

- Organization of new corporate markets (for example, the market of Internet-service providers).

The product development strategy involves:

- Expansion of the list of offered specialties.
- Quality Improvement of offered educational services.

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