

MARKETING YOUR ADVISING CENTER

Here, you'll find some marketing strategies that you should consider if you are looking for ways to make your advising center more appealing to students.

While on a recent sabbatical, I had the opportunity to visit a number of centralized university advising centers. In every instance I found the centers' staffs concerned and helpful; yet some centers seemed to be much busier than others.

After I reflected on this phenomenon, it occurred to me that the difference between the busy centers and the less-busy centers seemed to narrow down to circumstances that I shall refer to loosely as marketing. The centers that were busy had done an excellent job, either by conscious effort, or luck, or both, of marketing themselves to their campus clientele.

Following are some of the factors that seemed to affect the successful marketing of an advising center:

- **IMAGE** – The busy centers had created the perception that they had something the students needed or wanted. It appeared that the more services they offered, the busier they were. This was especially true when they were perceived to help students in major and career decision-making, **as** well as in study habits and tutoring. The proffered help not only involved talking to staff, but also included the opportunity to review a wealth of materials, especially career information, that students were free to take with them, if they so desired.
- **LOCATION** – The busier centers, like successful businesses, had good locations. They were often located in areas that were convenient for the advisees they served. The centers had easy accessibility, and were mainly located on first levels of buildings they occupied. The centers were clearly marked by large, well-placed signs. In addition, they were often clustered with other student services such **as** placement, counseling, career centers, and registrar's offices.
- **SERVICE** – Although in some cases the centers were not what one would call physically attractive, they did have someone greeting people in a friendly manner, and directing the students to the appropriate person. Usually this was done by an intake counselor or advisor. The centers were well staffed so that **no** one had to sit and wait for long periods of time. This was true of both scheduled appointments and walk-in clients. Besides individual help sessions, many of the centers offered workshops for both students and persons in the community. Providing services to students, however, was a top priority of the centers.

- **ADVERTISING** — Another common factor of these centers was that they did an excellent job of publicizing themselves. They had professional pictures of the staff posted in a prominent place; they had a large number of hand-out materials that included the center's name in a conspicuous place on the material, and they had contributed a number of articles and ads to the college newspapers. In addition, newsletters and letters from the centers kept the students informed and aware of the advising service. The busy centers made valuable use of advertising and public relations.
- **INNOVATION** — The busy centers were not afraid to be innovative. For instance, a center that was not in the best location had become mobile and had taken the services to where the students were. They had established an annex in an area with heavy student traffic. Another center, because of registration problems, helped devise a procedure where students were provided with an up-to-date summary of their credits at each registration. This helped eliminate a number of problems. Creative solutions to problems seemed to be characteristic of these centers.

It appears that advising centers, like successful businesses, have to involve themselves in successful marketing principles. Certain factors such as image, location, service, advertising, and innovative problem solving are important elements in determining the success of advising centers in higher education.