

Chapter 19

London Business School

Pre-Masters campaign



By Scott Williams, Serious Ideas

Contributing authors: Chris Norton and Mark Jackson, Serious Ideas

Other companies involved: Media Agency: Gyro International; Client: London Business School

Editor's summary

This paper is a granular account of micro-marketing at its best. London Business School was launching a new 'Masters in Management' programme, for undergraduate students who are about to graduate or who have less than a year of full-time work experience. The overall challenge was to reach a demographic that the School had not catered for before, while maintaining the prestige of the brand. But in sheer numerical terms, the targets were relatively low – the course would only take 100 students per year, for which 3,500 responses would be needed to select the very best. This pointed to a very precise approach. An innovative marketing model was adopted, using social networking, targeted email, affiliates and SEO/SEM. This strategy resulted in response and conversion figures 125% and 135% above their respective targets. Moreover, online commentary suggests that the London Business School's reputation has been enhanced by the activity rather than compromised.

Introduction

Using on-line advertising and innovative social marketing techniques, Serious Ideas delivered a fivefold return on marketing investment in the first year and a new demographic of customer to London Business School.

Background – a global brand

Incorporated by Royal Charter, London Business School specialises in postgraduate business degrees and executive education for experienced professionals. Each candidate undergoes a thorough application process and only the best are selected for each programme.

London Business School is one of the top-rated business schools in the world, currently ranked world number one by the *FT* for its MBA and executive MBA programmes. With Harvard, INSEAD, London School of Economics (LSE) and Institute for Management Development (IMD), it is one of the best-known brands in business education.

The brief

London Business School conceived a new postgraduate business degree programme designed specifically to target immediate graduates with little or no experience and provide them with the business skills and acumen to broaden their career prospects and enable them to stand out in a crowded graduate job market. The programme is called the Masters in Management (MiM).

The Masters in Management is an MSc degree positioned as a ‘unique new degree programme equipping students with the skills most desired by graduate employers and the fundamental business knowledge to increase their opportunities and guide them to success in whatever career they choose’. The decision to launch the programme was the result of identified market opportunities:

1. current and future market expectations for business education
2. qualitative studies involving top European recruitment companies, and student career services¹
3. evidence for growth opportunities through the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and the International Institute of Education
4. introduction of the Bologna Accord to harmonise the structure of degree education across Europe, stimulating interest amongst foreign students to seek business qualifications away from home
5. recognition of the increasing importance of earlier exposure to formal business training within undergraduate courses as a stepping-stone to a good entry-level job
6. business MScs becoming increasingly established

Objectives

With a total budget (including R&D and marketing) of £400,000, the following objectives were set:

1. achieve a total cumulative contribution made by the programme operating with one cohort of 100 students estimated at £2.0m for the 2009/10 academic year
2. create a qualified response target of 3,500 between October 2008 and May 2009
3. consider optimising a first page search listing on Google for the programme name.

Challenges

Overview

How do you identify, persuade, pre-qualify and ultimately convert elusive 19–24-year-old graduate students onto a new and untried business education programme worth £21,900 within 11 months?

Inexperience

This was not currently a demographic the School catered for – and as such had limited experience with, and no data on, the potential student's lifestyle or influences.

Brand threat

As the programme would open the School up to this less experienced audience, the launch announcement was met with some stakeholder opposition – primarily concerned with the degradation of the brand and resource availability. The scrutiny of its peers worldwide, and the unfavourable exposure in the business community if the programme was cancelled, was a serious issue to stakeholders.

Cost

The Masters in Management programme costs in excess of £20,000 for a year. In a beleaguered economy, cash-strapped bankers and even the most financially comfortable may think twice upon spending these sums on an unproven business programme.

Admission criteria

Candidates have to be of the highest calibre to qualify. Entrants must have completed the Graduate Management Admission Test® (GMAT®) with a score of at least 600 and demonstrated achievement in their current studies and extra-curricular activities.

Elusive influencers and buyers

Traditionally participants at the School have been either funded by their employer or had saved/budgeted themselves to self-fund. As this programme was aimed at young, new graduates, these participants would generally not have the funds to pay the fees themselves. This introduced a new key secondary audience: the Financial Backers, namely, parents.

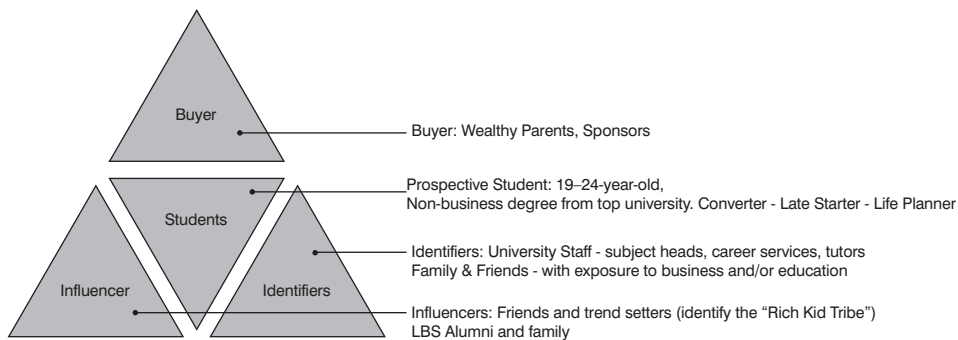
This was complicated further by the fact that both target audiences appeared to be poles apart in terms of demographics and areas of interest. To make things even more interesting, the Masters in Management was not just aimed at the UK, but a targeted European audience.

Methodology

Media planning

A natural choice was the internet. Evidence from the Tech Tribe report, showed an average 22% increase in social networking, chat and rich content, with undergraduates spending longer on the internet.² Using this as a core thought, backed by IPA research, we took the London Business School research and marketing teams through a lecture-style interactive workshop to establish media consumption, target segments and discover demographic insights.

Figure 1: Buying model



Together we developed the buying model to identify key segments:

- potential student: aged 19–24, intelligent, converter or life planner
- decision-maker/financial backer: parent/guardian, employer, wealthy, business focus
- referrers: alumni, careers services, universities

Customer segmentation – influencer/buyer/referrer profiling

Utilising internal School data, various demographic reports and interviews with key members of staff and students (including current, potential and alumni), a base model was drafted outlining the key target segments that had a direct effect on the buying decision.

Primary media choice – networks and on-line communities

Research now shifted focus to establishing key networks and on-line communities relevant to each segment, including websites they would tend to visit.

Segmented messaging development

We determined a range of messaging through targeted forums and blogs, targeted display advertising, email marketing, search engine marketing and pay-per-click for each segment, tailored to the context of each distribution channel and website.

Keyword creation

With a list of channels, message types and demographics established, it was then important to concentrate on keywords/phrases that could be used collectively throughout the campaign, linking them together and increasing organic search results. A first draft keyword list was generated and analysed for keyword effectiveness and popularity so it could be split into primary, popular and long-tail key phrases.

Timing of message deployment

Finally, research was carried out to find any key events or times in the year where segment interest will be heightened or diminished – e.g. careers events, holiday seasons and university term times.

Solution: the perpetual marketing model

Our media planning activity led to a breakthrough in our strategy. *If curious searchers of postgraduate business education linked with each other, contributing opinions and making recommendations, they would build a community that attracted its own searches. Once initially seeded it would become a self-perpetuating entity, marketing the Masters in Management with little or no further contribution by London Business School.*

We called this the Perpetual Marketing Model. This was in some way a development of the Wiki – in that information was put into the open on-line community and allowed to grow through on-line contribution and debate. The difference being that we were ‘seeding’ this debate and directing prospects to sites where their interest could be captured and converted into sales.

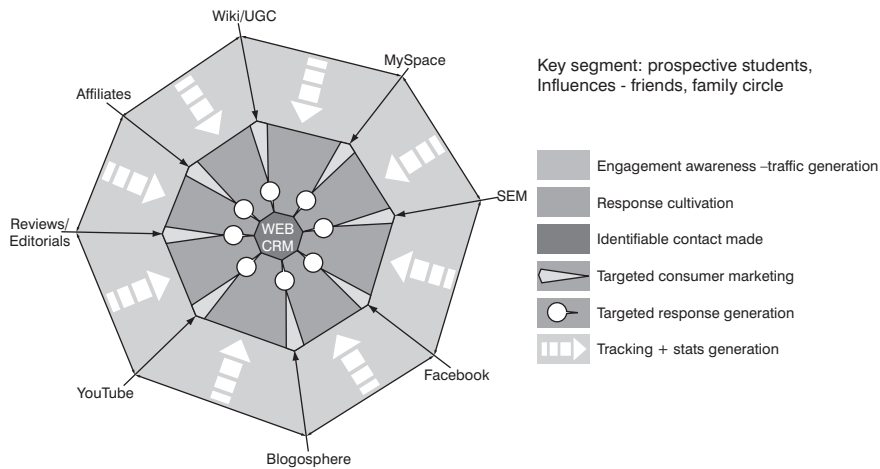
Figure 2 identifies how we would attract our key segments. The outer spines show potential contact points, which drive targeted traffic through a pre-defined channel. The user is presented with a targeted call to action, tailored to reflect the initial message that prompted the user journey.

‘Seeding’

To ignite interest we had to ‘seed’ information on-line that could root itself quickly and grow organically through debate, recommendation and word of mouth amongst interested communities. We proposed creating a net of on-line information ‘seeds’ that all linked in and out of each other and back to an optimised landing page. Over time this would increase link popularity for the landing page and primarily increase organic search results for the established keyword list.

These ‘seeds’ were established on low-cost social networking sites, user-generated content sites, on-line forums and using on-line PR and editorial content placement. The seeding activity needed to be carried out prior to any paid advertising in order to provide a foundation and information network for any party stimulated into active

Figure 2: Online approach



search by the paid advertising. This was designed to dramatically increase the return on investment of the paid advertising and improve conversion rates at minimal cost.

Deployment

The extent of our 'seeding' of information needed to be large enough to give the appearance of an on-line buzz but small enough to manage within the budget scope. The way this was achieved was to target key search terms and particular social networks.

From the analysis of the research it was clear that a good majority (89%) of the target student audience actively engaged in social networking (64% Facebook, 20% MySpace, 8% Bebo and 8% others³). As the majority of the content on social network sites relates to personal activities, interests and opinions, it was important to provide 'link-baiting' content on these sites to encourage viewers to pass it on to their friends. To kick start the traffic into these group areas a short-term display advertising campaign was initiated on Facebook and other popular postgraduate sites.

To back up the social networking content a blogging campaign was initiated. Members of the team registered on postgraduate information forums/blogs in an attempt to seek out questions that genuinely prompted for a response regarding the Masters in Management programme. The tone and content of each post was kept at an advisory level and each post was a direct response to a question in which the Masters in Management programme actually suited the enquirer. The blogging campaign served multiple purposes; (1) it shared valuable information with actual potential students; (2) it aids the users who are actively searching out the information; and (3) it helps organic search engine placement to the client's landing page.

On-line PR posts were used by the client to syndicate key press releases to targeted audiences. The on-line PR was more targeted to the decision-maker and parents of potential students. The press releases had an editorial style and provided factual data that would aid the decision-maker in their assessment of the programme value.

The site link was also added to various user-generated content sites (like Wikipedia) and was distributed to a host of free-to-list directory sites.

Targeted email marketing was also used in affiliation with identified high value universities. Emails were collated and sent out to university student unions who could then distribute them to targeted groups on their database.

Paid search engine advertising (pay-per-click) and targeted on-line display advertising was used throughout the campaign to raise initial awareness and interest.

Filtering

A traffic filtering process was created by Serious Ideas to reduce vetting responses and dealing with enquiries. Therefore the campaign was split into three areas, with filters applied to key stages.

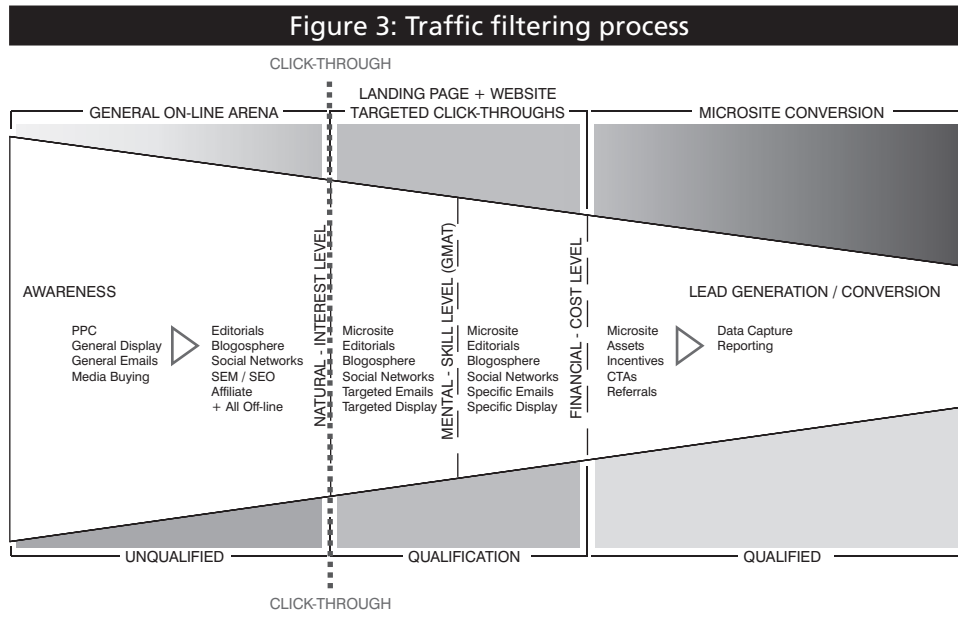


Figure 3 shows at the top the conversion status from cold to hot as the candidate moves from open web, into the net and into the lead generator (optimised landing page). The three stages in the middle white funnel highlight the key stages in generating the traffic.

Stage 1 – awareness/natural interest filtering

Awareness and response advertising was placed in targeted areas to stimulate click-through or specific active search. This stage was where the majority of the paid advertising was used and various messages helped filter the right leads. A click-through or product specific active search allowed the candidate to cross the first filter that is ‘natural interest level’.

Stage 2 – self-selection

Once the candidate entered into active search or clicked through into Stage 2 they found themselves within a pre-made hotspot of information. Each site specifically linked to other sites that contained relevant information. This stage made use of free and low-cost on-line PR, social network sites, user-generated content, blogs, forums and Wikis, etc.

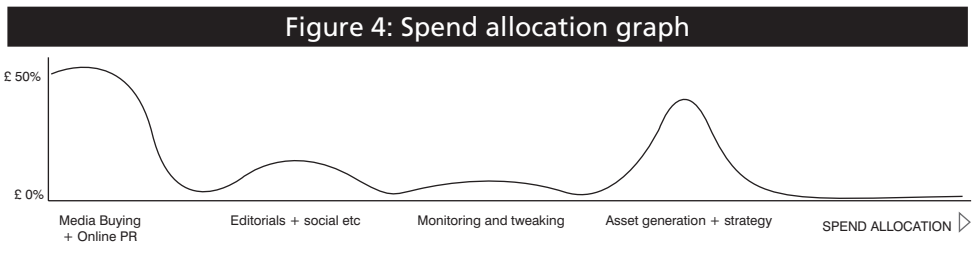
The success of this stage relied on the targeting of content as well as the amount available and how it was linked together. Stage 2 provided enough information to filter the candidate further by both mental ability and financial status. If the candidate had undertaken the GMAT® test (or is prepared to) then they passed the ‘mental ability filter’. If the candidate could afford the cost of the programme then they passed the ‘financial filter’. If both filters were passed then the candidate would generally click through into the landing page.

Stage 3 – the landing page

This third stage is referred to as the conversion generator. The vast majority of visitors will have navigated through enough information to ascertain their suitability. Thus the landing page was optimised maximising the chances of keeping the visitor’s interests high enough to make a purchase.

Campaign budget allocation

Figure 4 outlines the top-line budget split against a spend of £400,000.



- 50%: Media and paid advertising/PR
- 30%: Asset creation and agency costs
- 12%: Editorial content placement, social marketing and low-cost/free advertising
- 8%: Monitoring, analysis and adjustments

Activity planning

Throughout the campaign the pattern of advertising was planned to follow the 12-week schedule (Figure 5) – the midpoint of the paid advertising ideally coinciding with an event or period of heightened interest (e.g. Christmas when candidates and their financial backers were together).

Figure 5: The 12-week schedule

Weeks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
"Net" building	•		•		•		•					
Paid advertising					•	•	•	•				
Evaluation				•		•		•		•		
Adjustment*											•	•

*If required

Off-line activity

Through a series of European events and advertising, London Business School raised awareness, directing prospects on-line. Event marketing was also employed to spread the word among student groups.

Creative strategy

To a degree this campaign was all about anti-marketing, not overtly directing the prospect to take out a single key message through advertising. The messaging and creative in paid-for advertising played an integral part in the campaign.

Awareness messaging

The primary messages in paid-for advertising were based around career acceleration (see Figures 6 and 7):

The long road to success – just got shorter.

For graduates for whom the only option is success.

The creative used to support these messages was very simple and direct. For certain sites the messaging was tailored for maximum relevance. For example in Figure 6 a banner on the postgraduate careers website Milkround.com used the message 'Milkround – or crème de la crème?' This message highlights the same base message of success but plays on the environment of the site.

Results

Return on marketing investment

With no previous activity and bringing a new product to market without any other form of marketing, we can confidently conclude that the return of marketing investment is directly attributed to the activities carried out in this paper and achieving the results noted below.

All financial objectives have been achieved based on client data supplied up to 21 April 2009. The campaign achieved this within an overall budget spend of 12% in line with client expectations for investment and first year's delivery against predicted sales. We stretched our targets, delivering 135% over response targets. Data supplied

Figure 6: Milk round or crème de la crème

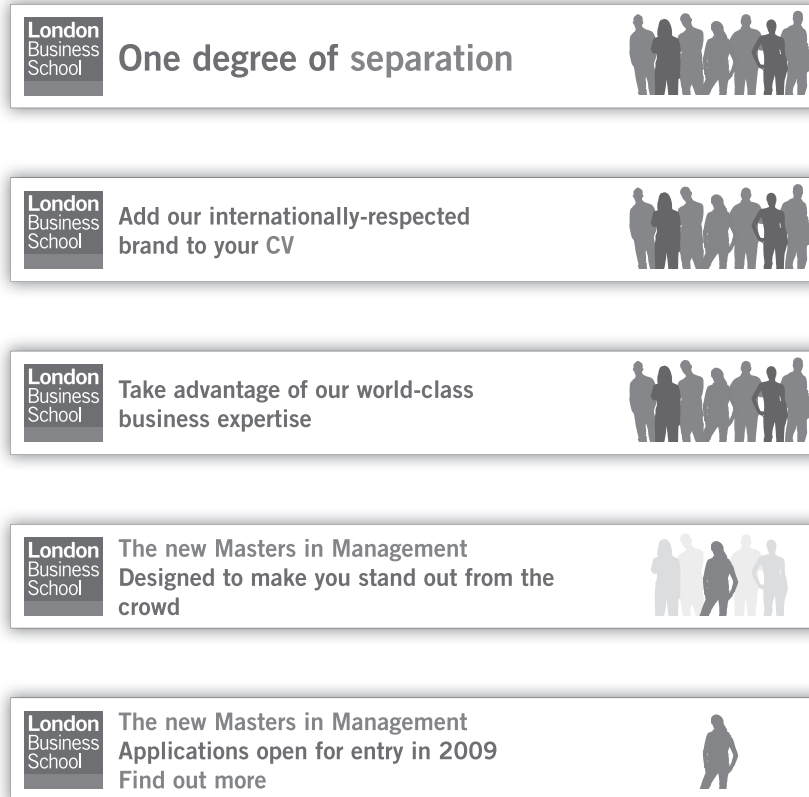


by London Business School: target for May 2009 = 3,500. To 21 April 2009 we have generated 4,721 responses.

Incremental revenue and net contribution

We are 125% over our conversion target to deliver 100 students to the programme for September 2009 at a cost of £400,000, producing a revenue stream of £2,190,000. This will deliver an incremental revenue of 87.5% against agency spend and an 80% incremental revenue earning against overall investment allocation for the first year. London Business School are in line with achieving their net contribution, taking into account incremental costs and the overall operating costs of running the programme.

Figure 7: One degree of separation



Contributing results

Over 100 back links were created through to the main Masters in Management page and from seeding, initial interest over 40 sites were reported to contain blogging conversations. On Facebook alone there is a dedicated Masters in Management Facebook Group with 55 members and 77 recent (at the time of writing the paper) conversation posts. Additional value was achieved during the campaign through on-line brand awareness by creating no. 1 organic Google search for 'Masters in Management', no. 8 search for the general word 'Masters' and no. 1 search for the string <Management> & <Masters>.

Figure 9 provides examples of qualitative results,⁴ showing the right target market, attitudes to the programme and a 'pass it on' mentality expected by the behaviours of our key segments, showing the real value of the Perpetual Marketing Model. As reported by one applicant attending the course this September 2009, they have now launched their own blog forum dedicated to all of the Master in Management students. The aim of the forum is to provide a diary of experiences whilst on the course and useful tips to future candidates applying for the 2010 programme.

Figure 8: Outstripping benchmark conversion targets

Result Stage Date	Timeline	Targets achieved	Percentage overachieved	Total percentage
Stage 1	5 January 2009	6 weeks	100%	122%
Stage 2	2 February 2009	5 weeks	100%	133%
Stage 3	28 February 2009	4 weeks	100%	125%
Stage 4	31 March 2009	5 weeks	100%	121%
Total (Avg)			100%	125.25%

Figure 9: Sample of user group activity

"You are able to get feedback and advice about the London experience and it is also a great opportunity to start networking"

"With a brand like the 'London Business School', it promises to be an amazing experience. My batch already consists of some amazing people, many of whom I have been able to interact with, and I'm sure, I will meet many more when I get to London!"
<http://XXXXX.wordpress.com/>

hey guys,

I am ****. Selected to the interview. should be in the next couple of weeks. inputs are welcome.

cheers,
**

Thanks ****,
today is a very good day indeed!!!

On a side note, my interviewer is a big entrepreneur (he has a couple of big ventures which are very popular in India), and he had said he is going to recruit from our batch next year... :)

Hey ****,

I had an amazing discussion with my interviewer (an alumni of the school), and it seems like an excellent place! I am now waiting for the final decision.

From my research, it seems like the school will be the perfect place for me, considering my personal and career goals.

I really hope the decision comes soon though, because my other options have their own deadlines by which I have to commit to them, though the School remains my first preference by far. :)

For the interview, I suggest you read your essays, and know yourself (your traits - positive and negative both). The interview isn't structured, it is a complete discussion, where the questions just flow naturally from your answers.

I am a little concerned with funding.

For those admitted, have you received any sort of financial aid from LBS?

Additionally, do you know of any outside sources of funding for graduate study abroad, besides federal aid?

Thanks in advance,
www.facebook.com

Notes

- 1 London Business School Proposal for a Pre-Experience Master In Management, 2008.
- 2 *Tech Tribe Report 2007 – Britain’s 16–25-year-olds.*
- 3 *www.facegroup.co.uk – Tech Tribe Report 2007, IPA.*
- 4 [wordpress.com](#); [www.london.edu/mastersinmanagement.html](#); [www.experienceproject.com](#); [www.postgraduateforum.com](#)

