

# **IPA EFFECTIVENESS AWARDS 2009 CASE STUDY**

**Agency:** Serious Ideas – Serious Marketing Communications Ltd

**Client:** London Business School

**Project:** Master in Management Programme launch

**Services:** Media and communications planning & delivery

**Authors:** Scott Williams, Chris Norton and Mark Jackson

## ***PERPETUAL MARKETING***

***The business case for recruiting a new generation of students using breakthrough digital social marketing***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Using online advertising and innovative social marketing techniques, SERIOUS delivered a five-fold return on marketing investment in the first year and a new demographic of customer to London Business School.

### **ABSTRACT**

London Business School prides itself on its world-class research, teaching and thought leadership and is known the world over as a top-ranked business school with close ties to the international business community.

Based on recent research, the School identified a new opportunity to add a further revenue stream and complement its existing degree programme portfolio by introducing a new business Masters aimed at an alternative audience: undergraduate students who are about to graduate or who have less than a year of full-time relevant work experience.

This paper sets out to demonstrate how a rigorous methodology was followed to launch the programme - and how prospects, decision makers and financial backers (parents) were identified, targeted and reached. Most importantly, it shows how an innovative marketing model was created that enabled us to spread the word and position the new programme through seeded online debate - which in turn grew awareness virally through social networking and interest groups. In essence, we initiated a self-perpetuating marketing campaign that continues to grow organically developing its own messaging and tone of voice.

The results to date have outstripped both response and conversion targets set, by 125% and 135% respectively. Our proven return on marketing investment demonstrates a spend and investment of £400,000 providing a revenue stream of £2.2 million in the first year.

## **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's number one by the FT for its MBA and executive MBA programmes. With Harvard, INSEAD, LSE and 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:

- i) Current and future market expectations for business education
- ii) Qualitative studies involving top European recruitment companies, and student career services\*
- iii) Evidence for growth opportunities through The European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and The International Institute of Education
- iv) 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
- v) 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.
- vi) Business MSc's 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 £2.0 million for 2009/10
2. Create a qualified response target of 3,500 between October and May 2009
3. Consider optimising a 1<sup>st</sup> 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 to 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

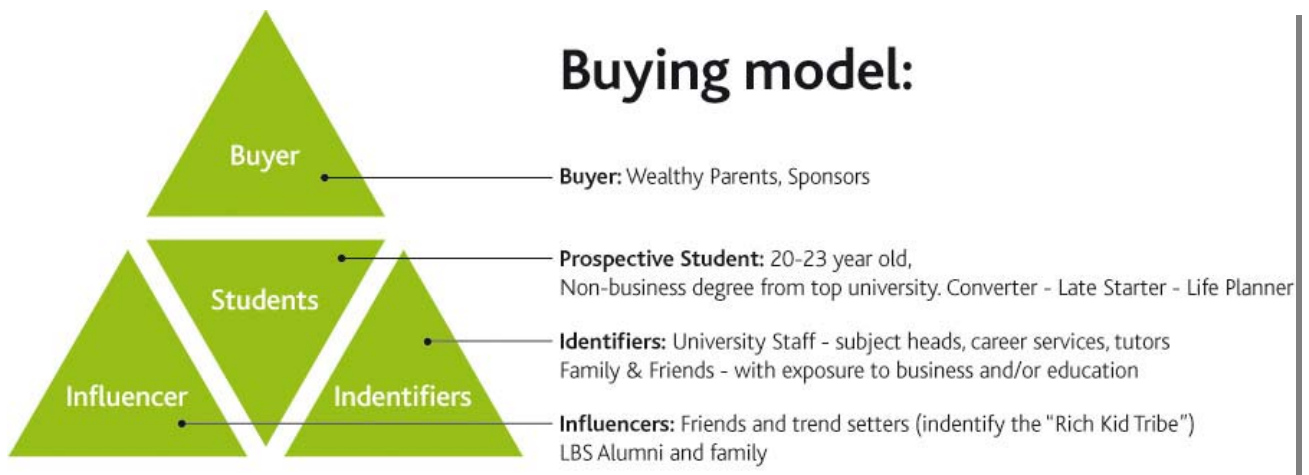
### Media planning

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\*\*.

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.

Together we developed the buying model to identify key segments.

**Figure One**



<b>Potential Student:</b>	Aged 19-24, intelligent, converter or life planner
<b>Decision Maker/ Financial Backer:</b>	Parent/guardian, employer, wealthy, business focus
<b>Referrers:</b>	Alumni, careers services, universities

### i) 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 alums; a base model was drafted outlining the key target segments that had a direct effect on the buying decision.

**ii) primary media choice - networks and online communities**

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

**iii) 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.

**iii) 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 it 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.

**iv) 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

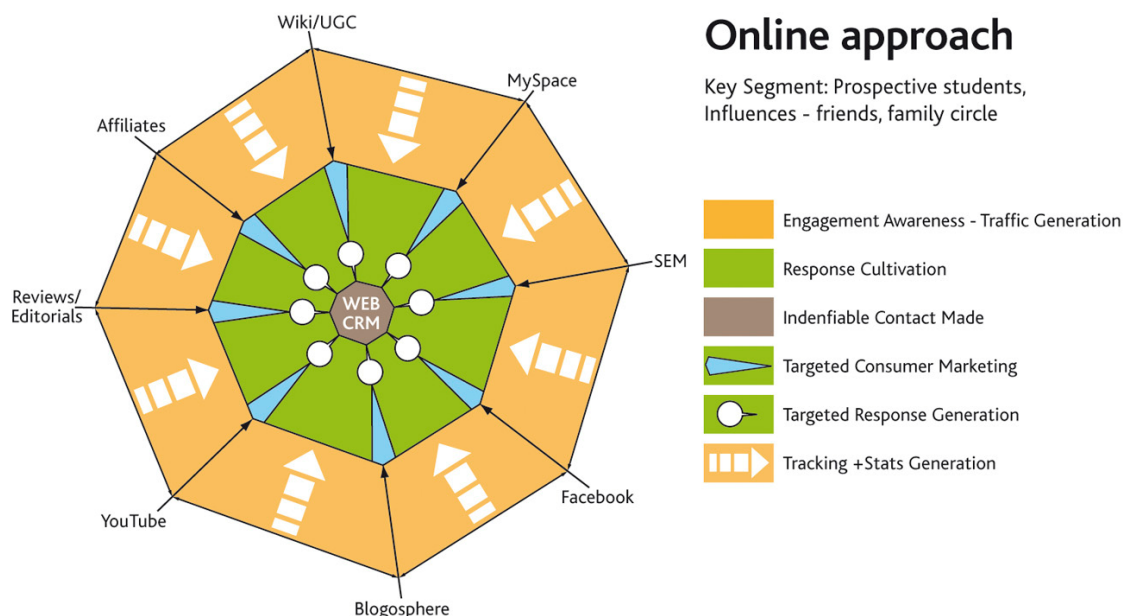
Our Media Planning activity led to a breakthrough in our strategy.

*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 online community and allowed to grow through online 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 two below 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.

**Figure Two**



### ‘Seeding’

To ignite interest we had to ‘seed’ information online that could root itself quickly and grow organically through debate, recommendation and word of mouth amongst interested communities. We proposed creating a net of online 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, online forums and using online PR & 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 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 online 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% others\*\*). 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 post graduate 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; one, that it shared valuable information with actual potential students; two, it aids the users who are actively searching out the information; and three, it helps organic search engine placement to the client's landing page.

Online PR posts were used by the client to syndicate key press releases to targeted audiences. The online 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.

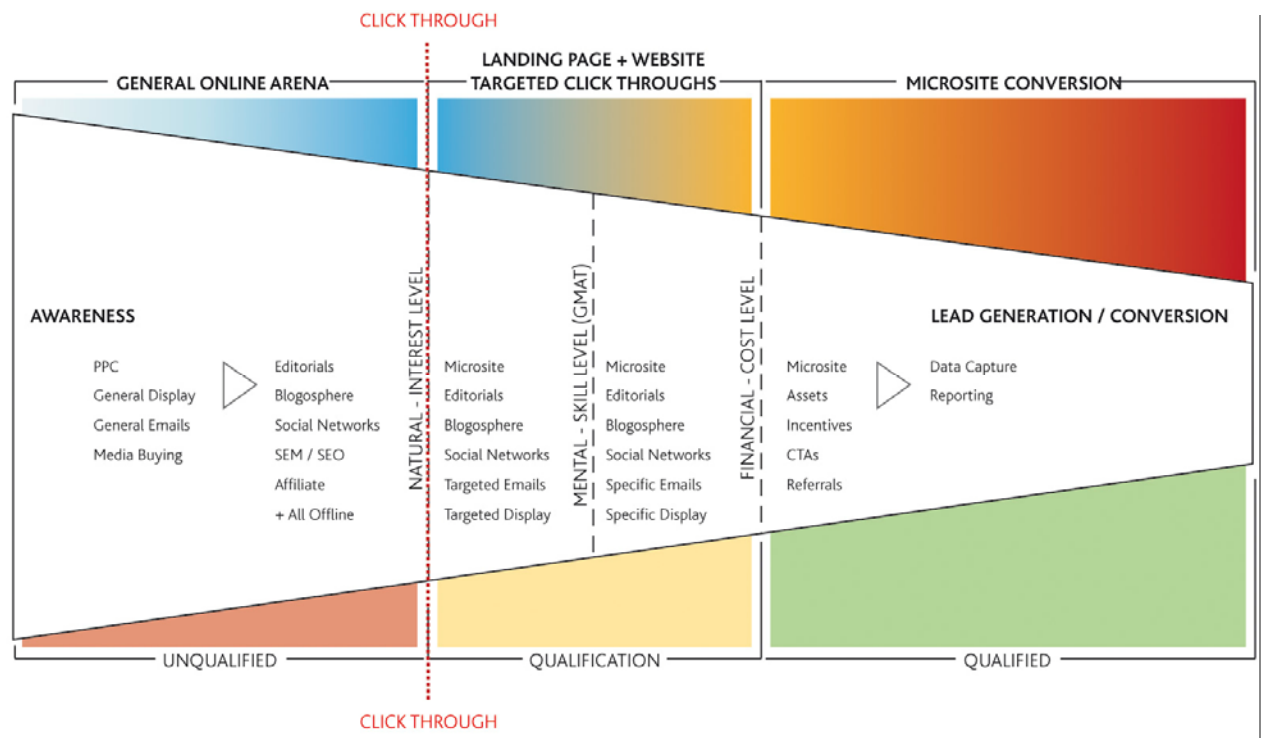
Targeted email marketing was also used in affiliation with identified high value universities. Emails were collated and sent out to university student unions who could then distribute them to targeted groups on their database.

Paid search engine advertising (Pay per click) and targeted online display advertising was used throughout the campaign to raise initial awareness and interest.

### Filtering

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

**Figure Three**



In Figure Three above it shows at the top the conversion status from cold to hot (blue to red) 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 one – 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 two – self-selection

Once the candidate entered into active search or clicked through into stage two 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 online PR, social network sites, user-generated content, blogs, forums and Wiki’s etc.

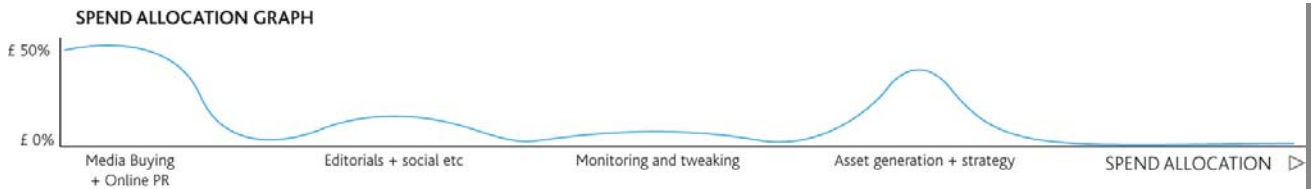
The success of this stage relied on the targeting of content as well as the amount available and how it was linked together. Stage two provided enough information to filter the candidate further by both mental ability and financial status. If the candidate had undertaken the GMAT test (or is prepared 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 three – 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

The following graph 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 below – the midpoint of the grey area ideally coinciding with an event or period of heightened interest (e.g. Christmas when candidates and their financial backers were together).

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

\*If required

## Offline activity

Through a series of European events and advertising, London Business School raised awareness, directing to prospects online. 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 Figure Four and Five):

“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 Four a banner on the post-graduate 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.

**Figure Four**

London Business School

London Business School **Milk round**

London Business School **Milk round or crème de la crème?**

London Business School **Stand out from the crowd with the new postgraduate degree from our top-ranked business school**

London Business School **Take advantage of our world-class business expertise**

London Business School **The Masters in Management**  
Designed to increase your career opportunities

London Business School **Applications open for entry in 2009**  
**Find out more**

London Business School

**The long road to success**

London Business School

**Just got shorter**

**Success**

London Business School

**Masters in Management**

A new degree programme from our top-ranked business school

Designed to increase graduates' career opportunities

London Business School

**Masters in Management**

Applications open for entry in 2009

**Find out more**

**Figure Five**

**London Business School**  
**One degree of separation**  
Add our internationally-respected brand to your CV  
Take advantage of our world-class business expertise

**London Business School**  
**The new Masters in Management**  
Designed to make you stand out from the crowd  
**The new Masters in Management**  
Applications open for entry in 2009  
**Find out more**

**London Business School**  
**For graduates for whom the only option is success**  
**No work experience necessary**  
**Just talent and ambition**  
**Add our internationally respected brand to your CV**

**London Business School**  
**Masters in Management**  
Designed to give you what you need to **succeed**  
**Masters in Management**  
Applications open for entry in 2009  
**Find out more**

## **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 to achieving the results noted below.

All financial objectives have been achieved based on client data supplied up to 21st April 2009.

The campaign achieved this within an overall budget spend of 12% in line with client expectations for investment and 1<sup>st</sup> year's delivery against predicted sales.

We stretched our targets delivering 135% over response targets. Data supplied by London Business School – Target for May 2009 = 3,500. To 21<sup>st</sup> April 2009 we have generated 4,721.

### 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 1<sup>st</sup> year. London Business School are inline with achieving their net contribution taking into account incremental costs and the overall operating costs of running the programme.

### Outstripping benchmark conversion targets

Result stage	Date	Timeline	Targets achieved	Percentage overachieved	Total percentage
Stage 1	5th January 2009	6 weeks	100%	22%	122%
Stage 2	2nd February 2009	5 weeks	100%	33%	133%
Stage 3	28th February 2009	4 weeks	100%	25%	125%
Stage 4	31st March 2009	5 weeks	100%	21%	121%
<b>Total (Avg)</b>			<b>100%</b>	<b>25.25%</b>	<b>125.25%</b>

### 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. Additional value was achieved through online 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 Five provides examples of qualitative results\*\*\*, 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 providing useful tips to future candidates applying for the 2010 programme.

**Figure Five**

**SAMPLE 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/>

*"Why is it all the good courses cost so much? Just seen this course in London [www.london.edu/mastersinmanagement.html](http://www.london.edu/mastersinmanagement.html) and it looks pretty good - but I haven't got £22k*

*Makes me cry - I don't suppose anyone's got any spare cash?"*<http://www.experienceproject.com/>

*"If you live in London then the best school in the area is London Business School (according to the FT rankings tables it is no2 in the world for MBAs). I notice they are just starting a new programme called Masters in Management which is a one year MSc. They also offer a part time MBA. You do need to be aware that you need to have passed the GMAT and courses are quite expensive."* <http://www.postgraduateforum.com/>

*Not all business masters require previous work experience. I'm looking at an MSc at London Business School which you can do even if you have no business experience at all.*

<http://www.londonstudent.co.uk/forums/>

**ENDNOTES**

Source: \*London Business School Proposal for a Pre-Experience Master In Management, 2008'

Source: \*\*Tech Tribe Report 2007 – Britain's 16-25 year olds

Source: \*\*[www.facegroup.co.uk](http://www.facegroup.co.uk) – Tech Tribe Report 2007, IPA

Source: \*\*\*[wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com)

Source: \*\*\*[www.london.edu/mastersinmanagement.html](http://www.london.edu/mastersinmanagement.html)

Source: \*\*\*[www.experienceproject.com](http://www.experienceproject.com)

Source: [\\*\\*\\*www.postgraduateforum.com](http://www.postgraduateforum.com)

***Thank you***

*Our thanks goes to our wonderful client, London Business School, in particular Rosemary Clark and the Masters In Management team for their support, dedication to making the campaign happen and the work on providing us with the necessary material for this case study.*

*We would also like to thank our colleagues at SERIOUS, in particular the digital team and their overall cleverness in helping bring the strategy to life and successful implementation.*