

## **How to promote professional development programmes and training courses to teachers**

### **1. The central problem**

Most schools and most teachers receive a lot of promotions for courses. These can range in content: from a promotion for a talk at the Education Show on a new government initiative to a promotion for an individual who can come into the school and do a one day session on behaviour modification; from a promotion for a renowned expert in dyscalculia to one for a team which advocates the idea of continuous study skill tuition throughout schooling.

The central problem is therefore this: if the people you want to reach in school are already receiving a range of leaflets and catalogues dealing with in-service training and continuing professional development, why should they read your leaflet and then, even if they do read literature, why should they sign up to your course, rather than someone else's?

Almost certainly you will get some people signing up for your course because your promotional material happens to land in the teacher's pigeon hole at exactly the right moment. That bit is easy. But normally you will need more than the occasional sign up that you can get through this route. You need people to see your promotion and decide that this is a course that they should be on - either by inviting you to the school to run an in-service session or by them coming to a day that you have arranged elsewhere.

The problem you have at this initial stage of promoting your course can be broken down into the following sections:

- a) How to get the teacher to read your promotional material
- b) How to get them to stay focussed on your idea
- c) How to get them to decide that this is an area of training that is worthwhile
- d) How to get them to choose you to do the course.

Of course, you might be helped at once by the fact that your approach is unusual – unique even. But I would offer a word of warning. I regularly talk to companies that provide CPD programmes who tell me that their programme is unique. Undoubtedly some are, but there are two problems with such claims. Firstly, you need to be sure (a lot of claims are made concerning uniqueness which are based on belief rather than research). Secondly, you need to ensure that the teachers recognise that your programme is unique and just what they want. If the teacher doesn't appreciate that this sort of programme is not available anywhere else and that it is exactly what is needed, then your uniqueness goes to waste.

## **2. Methods of marketing courses and training programmes**

The prime approaches are direct mail and email. In direct mail you can use solo mail (your item on its own – high response rates but the highest costs) and shared mail (lower cost but with less flexibility and lower response rates). In terms of email there are a range of lists available, ranging from lists of teachers who have asked for information to be sent to their personal email address to lists which email to the school's general address.

Thus, sending out leaflets or emails and expecting to get lots of teachers interested isn't quite what it is about. There are two issues: choosing the right media and having exactly the right message, presented in the right way. If any of this isn't quite right, the promotion will fail.

Thus it is quite possible to have a brilliant course on offer, but a promotion which simply doesn't work because of the medium or the message.

There's more detail on the media in section 7

### **3. Making them choose you**

One of the great benefits to any company that is attempting to break into the world of continuous professional development and in-service training is that most organisations working in this field don't maximise the effectiveness of their advertising. This is because they tend to copy other firms and drift into a standardised mode of announcement advertising which basically says:

- a) This is the course title
- b) This is what it aims to do
- c) These are the people who will benefit from attending
- d) These are the locations and the dates.

This approach is fine if there are large numbers of people who want to come on your course – who are in fact waiting in schools thinking, “if only there was a course available on this topic”. These people will see your advertisement and think “at last”, and sign up.

But, of course, for most people life is not like this. They receive lots of announcements about courses and most pass them by. If you really do believe that your course is unique and that everyone is waiting for it, then yes, you can offer your announcement and it should work. But most of us are not in this position.

What you need to do is ensure that your promotional materials are read and considered, and this requires specific tactics which go beyond the notion of

simply sending out a leaflet or an email from time to time and hoping for the best.

#### **4. The solution**

For most firms several solutions will be available, and the most successful professional development companies use a combination of approaches, while continuing to experiment with others in the meanwhile.

##### **4.1 Promote the benefits from the course in a concrete manner**

This will immediately separate you from the competition – and the more you can talk about the fact that “at the end of the course you will be able to”, rather than stressing that the course will be “looking at” or “exploring”, then the more likely you are to have success.

##### **4.2 Use various media**

Not every media will work for you every time, but most companies find that several approaches can work. It is worth trying both direct mail and email simply because different schools have different approaches to the two types of promotion. Some schools will say, “we don’t forward email to teachers”, while others will state that they prefer email and applaud its more environmentally friendly credentials.

However, you cannot use the same approach in both email and direct mail. Email will need a link to a website; direct mail will need to be complete in itself.

##### **4.3 Experiment with the text**

No matter what you are advertising, there is never one way of writing the advertisement. Because you are selling a course to teachers the text is going to

be more important than any pictures, because these are highly educated, literate people who place a high value on the written word. What's more, the product you are selling – the course – is much more readily described in text.

But what text? There will be many ways of approaching the text – even if you stick to our idea of focussing on the benefits. You will need to change the text as you proceed because it is impossible to keep selling courses using the same advert over and over again. You should experiment continuously so that when an advertisement's response rate starts to decline you have a new advert ready to replace it.

#### **4.4 Try to keep to one course at a time**

If you offer a range of courses it will be tempting to advertise all of them all the time, getting the most out of each promotion. But it is often more productive to focus on just one course per advertisement and this is normally the most successful approach.

If you wish to try a variant, consider offering two courses on one leaflet (but not one on the front and one on the back of a leaflet. In the direct mail advertisement run them in two columns so both are visible at once.)

The alternative approach to advertising more than one course in one promotion involves once more focussing on one course, but listing the other options at the end, with a link to details about them on a website. However, always remember that the more alternative courses you mention, the more you are encouraging the reader to delay and look at alternatives rather than place a booking here and now.

Most promotions for courses in most subject areas are written in the same stylised way which generally has not been evolved from experimentation and research. Often there is a focus on the locations available and lots of details

about the person leading the course. But this is not necessarily the right approach. While you most certainly should focus on the course leader if the course leader is nationally famous, there is no point in doing this if the reader will not have heard of the course leader.

A much more exciting alternative involves getting the reader so enthused by the course that he or she will not even think, “where is it on?” but rather will say, “I must go to this, irrespective of how far I have to travel.” In other words – sell the course, not the speaker (unless the reader is certain to have heard of the speaker) and not the location.

If the course you are offering is new, there is still little point in saying that it is “NEW!” because that normally is not what makes a person sign up for a course. We go on a course because of the benefit we perceive that we will get from it, nothing else.

A text which is written in a professional manner, reflecting the way in which we speak with teachers, will greatly improve response rates.

#### **4.5 Study the psychology of perception**

When planning the layout of your leaflet, consider the psychology of perception – the way in which people look at leaflets, what they see first and how they react. It is not possible to explain all the details here, because it is a major area of study in its own right, but if you want to learn more you can look at [www.theory.bz](http://www.theory.bz) – a website devoted to this study. Alternatively, you can send a copy of your most recent leaflet to Hamilton House and we’ll take a look and let you know about any changes you might want to make.

However there are a couple of key points to consider from the start. On a sheet of A4 the eye starts about 30% of the way down the page – and that is where you need your headline in large type.

The eye finds it easier to read a page which has plenty of white space around the text – large margins, short paragraphs with a double space between them. Excessive use of bold or italics does not help, nor does having illustrations behind the text or different colours. The best approach involves black text on a suitably coloured background. If you are using any pictures don't let them get too close to the text – otherwise they will distract. In email certainly try to avoid all illustration.

### **5. Who are you writing to?**

Sometimes the person to whom you should send your details is obvious, but not always. Firstly, don't try to get people within a school to circulate a leaflet – it simply doesn't happen very much, and it has the negative impact that no one takes ownership of the catalogue. If your leaflet says "History, PSHE, Humanities, Behaviour, please circulate," no one believes it is for them – you lose contact with everyone.

Instead, you will need to do one leaflet for the head of history, one for the head of PSHE, and so on. What you certainly can do is include several leaflets in an envelope together, each for a different teacher.

### **6. When to mail, how often to mail?**

Teachers need time to plan courses. If you are asking teachers to visit your location for the course then they not only have to write it in their diary, they also have to get permission from the deputy head to attend, and someone has to arrange cover for the teacher's classes.

For this reason it is worth considering a promotion of a course in two parts: once about six or eight weeks ahead for those who are in schools where such matters are always planned and organised well in advance; and a second

promotion (assuming you still have places) two or three weeks later. (Obviously school holidays will interfere with this schedule so these are just rough guides.)

What you can do is undertake one promotion by email and one by direct mail – or even have a direct mail promotion eight weeks before, an email promotion six weeks before, and a final direct mail piece one month before.

## **7. The media in detail**

There are six major ways of reaching teachers directly. In the list that follows we exclude shows (where you can back up your direct marketing, but you are selling in a completely different way and only to those who turn up at the show), telephone selling (which reaches only a tiny number of teachers because of the difficulty of getting through and the growing use of CTPS by schools) and fax marketing (which is also undermined by the use of FPS). CTPS and FPS make it illegal to get in touch with schools through the medium of phone or fax (respectively) if they have registered.

Here are the six methods and their applications:

### **a) Solo mail**

Solo mail is the obvious method for advertising courses that have a geographic reach – you can select the regions and type of school to promote to and, of course, direct the advertising to the teacher most likely to attend.

You can also analyse your customer base to see what type of schools your clients come from. I am often told by companies that “we sell to everyone” but it is extremely rare to find that an analysis of teachers on courses shows this to be the fact. A typical analysis might show that while 10% of secondary schools in England are specialist arts schools, only 1% of your clients come from this

group. Or while 60% of schools on your list have fewer than 100 pupils, only 5% of your clients come from this group.

When such information arises you can use solo mailing to target schools more precisely – either by removing underperforming groups or by creating promotional material specifically designed for them.

Secondly, solo mailing is ideal for testing. It gets the highest level of response rates and has the highest level of flexibility, and so it can be used to undertake all types of test. You should not be afraid to try several different advertisements for a course to see which one works. For example, if you have 1000 schools that you are promoting to, you might create four separate advertisements and send each one to 25% of your clientele. That will show you which of your four adverts works best. And then, for your follow-up mailing, the three groups that did not get that best performing advertisement can get it, while you try the second best performing advert as a follow-up to the schools that got the best performing advert first time around.

#### **b) Shared mail**

Shared mailing is ideal for reaching different teachers each week and for putting new course details to teachers on a regular basis. If you have two or three leaflets for different teachers, shared mailings can be an exceptionally powerful way of promoting because the second and third piece will be sent at a very discounted price.

Shared mailings, however, become less attractive financially if you only wish to mail a handful of areas.

### **c) Subscription email**

Subscription email lists are by far the most responsive of email lists – with response rates often approaching those of solo mail. They are made up of teachers who have asked to be on a mailing list (that is, they have chosen to be on it; they have not joined by simply ticking a box saying “yes, send me other people’s adverts”). The only downsides are that you cannot use them over and over again and that you cannot select regionally. You might be able to get a piece in a subscription email service once every half term – certainly no more – and you have to recognise that you are going to the whole of the UK – so it is only worthwhile if your course is “on tour”.

Where you can get such a piece listed you should use it to describe a particular course (not the whole catalogue) and link from the email to the website page that describes the course in more detail. From that website page you should also have a link to an index of your whole list of courses for the coming year.

There is the added benefit that advertisements placed on the subscription lists of Hamilton House also appear on [www.blog.schools.co.uk](http://www.blog.schools.co.uk) or other specialist sites, thus adding significantly to the readership level.

You can read more about emailing teachers at [www.yesmail.org.uk/schools.html](http://www.yesmail.org.uk/schools.html)

### **d) Personal email**

Personal emails go directly to teachers’ email addresses at school. These teachers have not opted in to receive these emails but their personal school address has been made available by the school. If you make the subscription list work (or if there is no subscription list available), it is worth moving on to this list and using it in the same way as the subscription list. It is the second most effective of the email lists. Additionally, it can be selected regionally, which

means it is of particular use if you are only offering the course in certain locations.

#### **e) Preference email**

In some schools, teachers' email addresses are not released and the administrative staff are instructed to receive all emails centrally and then forward them to the relevant member of staff. The preference list excludes schools that have personal email lists (see d) above) and uses the school's preferred address, with the name of the teacher and the job title of the teacher on the subject line of the email. If you are finding that the personal email list works for you, this should be your next choice. It also has the benefit of being a lot cheaper than subscription and personal email lists and once again can be selected regionally.

#### **f) School email**

If personal and preference email address lists are not available, if you are not able to book space in them (and both lists are restricted to avoid over-mailing), or indeed if you have used other options with success, it is always worth trying the school email list. Here the school's general email address is mailed and the title of the teacher required is inserted into the subject line. This type of list will generate the lowest response rate, but it is also the cheapest, and some companies do find it works.

In all email mailing you should get details of the open rate and the click through rate for each promotion. We keep details of the rates we have achieved recently, and it is therefore possible to compare the results of your promotion with that of other companies immediately, and this will give insights into how your advertisements could be changed to be more effective.

## **8. More help and support**

- a) Daily report on education marketing can be found on the Education Marketing news report. Just email [education-marketing-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:education-marketing-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)
- b) A selection of the articles from the daily email report also appear on [www.blog.educationmarketing.org.uk](http://www.blog.educationmarketing.org.uk)
- c) To discuss any specific aspect of your promotions or campaigns please call 01536 399 000, or if you would like a commentary on your current marketing promotions to schools, email [Sales@hamilton-house.com](mailto:Sales@hamilton-house.com) or fax 01536 399 012 or write to Hamilton House Mailings plc, Earlstrees Ct, Earlstrees Rd, Corby, Northants, NN17 4HH
- d) For more information on solo mail please visit [www.solo.ac](http://www.solo.ac)
- e) For more information on shared mail please visit [www.shared.org.uk](http://www.shared.org.uk)
- f) For more information on email please visit [www.yesmail.org.uk/schools.html](http://www.yesmail.org.uk/schools.html)
- g) For more information on how to write and design mailshots please visit [www.theory.bz](http://www.theory.bz)

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