

ANALYSIS OF DISTANCE LEARNING MARKETING AT VILNIUS GEDIMINAS TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY (LITHUANIA)

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the education system in Lithuania. The special emphasis paid on distance education. The paper analyses the possible ways of advertising and management of distance education in Lithuania. The possible ways of marketing and management are described. The means, which also could be used in management of distance education are analyzed and the emphasis made on those, which are not used, like banners and etc. The case of Distance Learning Management and Advertisement at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, at the Department of Construction Economics and Property Management is described.

Keywords: Distance education, marketing, questionnaire.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is a process of teaching-learning in which the learner is physically separated from the teacher. The geographical distances involved may be relatively small, or very large. Most definitions accept that there may be a degree of physical interaction between teacher and learner, but in comparison with the normal classroom experience the actual amount of face-to-face contact is usually much reduced or even non-existent. Because of this, the teacher develops a range of learning materials to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes to the learner. The presence of such technical media (print, audio, video, computer-based) is a distinguishing feature of distance education. Students study these materials, generally alone, at times and in places of their own choosing. There are arrangements to test their knowledge, skills and attitudes through assignments that are sent to a tutor for marking, or marked by computer (Rumble, 1997).

Marketing is a "social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and values with others." It is an integrated process through which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return (Kotler, et al, 2008). In this paper we are focusing on distance learning in Lithuania and the possible customers – distance learning students: on all related marketing problems.

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN LITHUANIA

According to Invest in Lithuania, Lithuania has twice as many people with higher education than the EU-15 average and the proportion is the highest in the Baltic. Also, 90% of Lithuanians speak at least one foreign language and half of the population speaks two foreign languages, mostly Russian and English or Polish.

Vilnius University is one of the oldest universities in Northern Europe and the largest university in Lithuania. Kaunas University of Technology is the largest technical university in the Baltic States and the second largest university in Lithuania.

Other universities include Kaunas University of Medicine, Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, Vilnius Pedagogical University, Vytautas Magnus University, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, The General Jonas Zemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, Klaipeda University, Lithuanian Veterinary Academy, Lithuanian University of Agriculture, Siauliai University and Vilnius Academy of Arts (Wikipedia, 2009). The Lithuanian education system is shown in Figure 1.

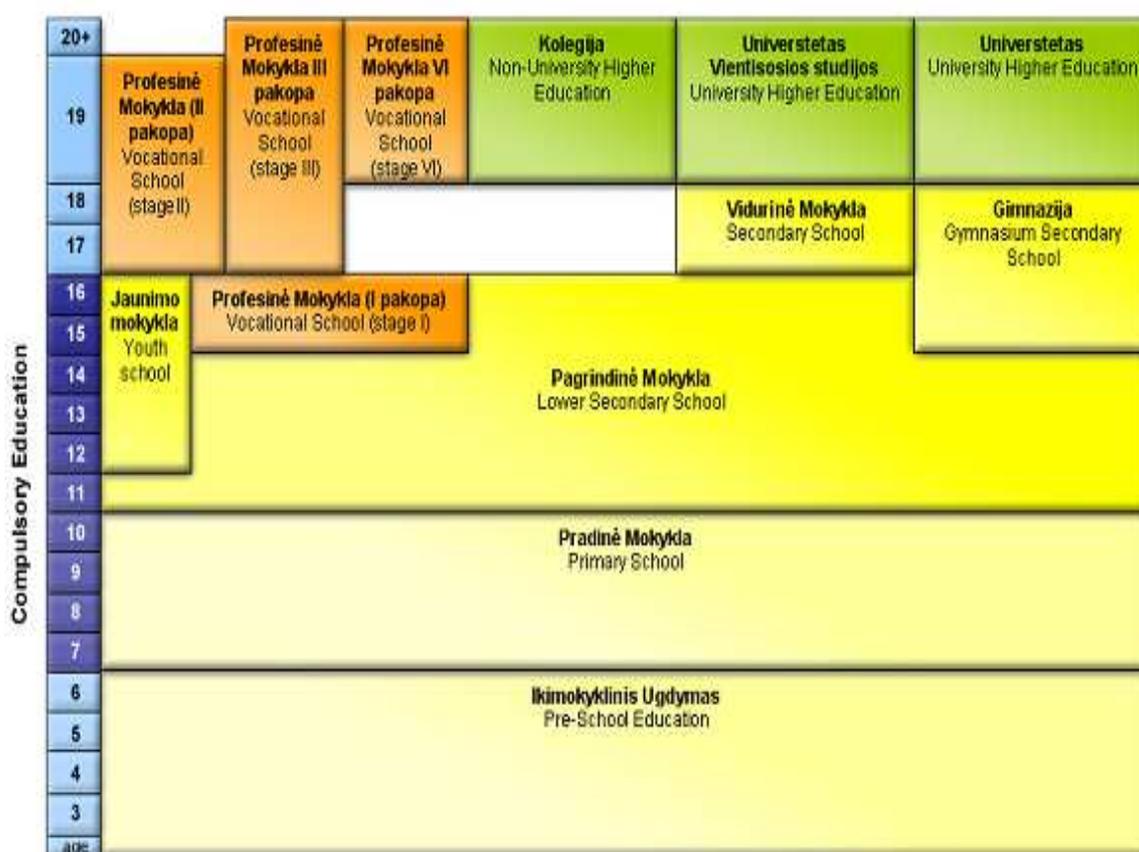


Figure 1
 The Lithuanian education system (based on National summary sheets on education system in Europe and ongoing reforms, 2009)

Explanation of The Lithuanian Educational System

- *Pre-school.* The pre-school programme is on offer for children aged from 5 to 6 at nursery schools, school nursery schools and primary school is conducted by qualified teaching staff and is voluntary.
- *Primary and lower secondary school.* School begins at the age of 6-7, ten class system for primary and lower secondary education. The 4-year primary school is followed by 6 years of basic education. If a

pupil is successful in the final examination, this concludes with a basic education certificate (the equivalent of the intermediate school leaving certificate in Germany).

- *Upper secondary education.* After completion of basic education, a two-year course of upper secondary education may be embarked upon. It is also possible to transfer to an upper secondary school upon completion of class 8, this school then continuing until class 12. In classes 11 and 12, pupils are permitted to select subjects in a targeted way in accordance with their personal interests and strengths.
- *Vocational education and training.* Vocational education and training can be completed in vocational schools by young people from the age of 14. The training comprises the imparting of both theoretical and practical knowledge. Four types of training programme are differentiated. *Type 1.* For young people from the age of 14 who have not gained a basic education leaving certificate which forms the basis of vocational education and training. This framework also affords the opportunity of gaining the lower secondary school leaving certificate. *Type 2.* 3-year vocational education and training for those who have gained the basic education leaving certificate. They acquire a VET qualification (skilled worker status). *Type 3.* Is for those who have passed the upper secondary school leaving certificate, 1 to 2 years of vocational training. *Type 4.* For those who have passed the upper secondary school leaving certificate, 3 to 4 year course of training comprising higher education and occupational qualification. Some modules correspond to Bachelor level, and credit for these may be transferred to a later course of higher education study.
- Vocational education and training, however, is not very popular with young Lithuanians, since it provides only limited knowledge which is no longer sufficient on the current labor market in the form is imparted. Many young people wish to obtain more knowledge about work within the private sector or about self-employment.
- *Higher education.* Lithuania has academic (universities) and non-academic institutes of higher education (colleges). Students gain entry via selection procedures which mostly involve consideration being accorded to marks obtained in the upper secondary school leaving certificate. Higher education is based on the European credit system. The duration of the course of study leading to the acquisition of a Bachelor degree (basic higher education study) is 4 years. This can be followed by a one or two year vocational qualification diploma, such as a teaching qualification or a Masters degree which in turn can be followed by a doctorate (National summary sheets on education system in Europe and ongoing reforms, 2009).

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA

In 1993, Lithuania joined the PHARE Multi-country Program for Distance Education. The Minister for Education and Science issued an order to establish the Lithuanian Centre for Extramural Education (LNSC), which is responsible for implementation of the program in Lithuania. EU funds for pilot activities within the PHARE Multi-country Program for Distance Education were first granted in 1995, when LNSC and EC signed an agreement for the first (pilot) year in Lithuania. The results of this program in Lithuania may be briefly described as follows:

- universities, other higher education establishments, the Parliament (*Seimas*) and the Government now are more aware of the significance of modern distance education for the development of Lithuania;
- the first group of lecturers for modern distance education was trained;
- the first two modern distance education centers were established in Kaunas University of Technology and Vilnius University, as well as three student support centers in Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Vilnius School of Electronics and Kaunas School of Technology;
- the first modern distance courses prepared in Lithuania were launched.

The expansion of the distance education network is also funded by the Lithuanian national budget. The investment program of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania "Development of Distance Education in

Lithuania” was launched as early as in 1998; the program covered creation of the infrastructure for distance education video conferencing:

it was planned to expand the network of modern distance education classrooms in Lithuania, as well as to prepare laboratories and studios with versatile equipment (Targamadze, et al, 1999).

The Lithuanian Distance Education Network (LieDM) is the main distance education infrastructure in Lithuania open to public at large; it enables universities, colleges, vocational schools and other education and training organizations to render distance education services (see Figure 2).

The video conferencing network developed in Lithuania during the LieDM project facilitates development of a joint system for education support throughout Lithuania (Rutkauskiene, et al, 2003).

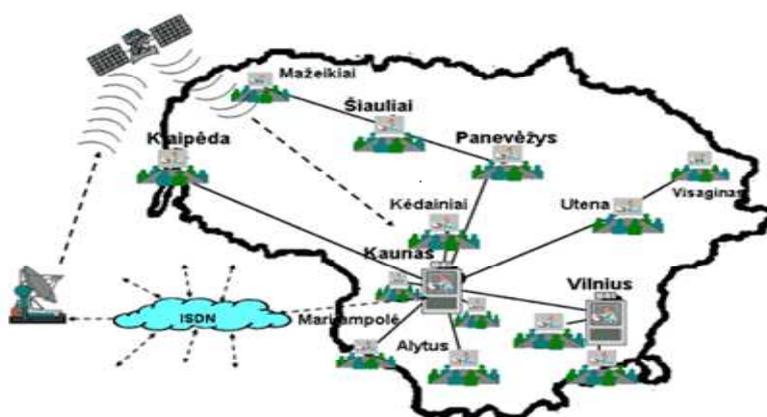


Figure 2
 Lithuanian Distance Education Network (LieDM)(Rutkauskiene et al, 2003)

A distance classroom can communicate with any other Lithuanian or foreign institution with the help of either Internet or ISDN. The events streamed via the LieDM network can be used as sources of both information and education throughout Lithuania. They are, for instance, various recorded workshops, conferences and meetings, or presentations, examinations and lectures.

Geographically, the LieDM network covers the entire territory of Lithuania (see Figure: 5), though it is more developed in our cities, which have more universities, institutes and colleges, as well as are home to bigger numbers of students and teachers (Trinkunas, et al., 2008). The aim is to further develop Lithuanian Distance Learning Network LieDM and support its activity, create information technology based and integrated e-learning space, providing possibilities for every Lithuanian citizen to learn as well as retain and develop competences all lifelong despite the dwelling place.

Creation and development of the portal “Lithuanian Virtual University (LVU)” ([http:// www.lvu.lt/app](http://www.lvu.lt/app)) is part of the program of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania “Lithuanian Virtual University 2007–2012”, which carries on and expands activities of the previous programs and attracts new institutions to such activities (Lithuanian Virtual University, 2009).

At present time the programs and courses are provided at following universities and colleges: Lithuanian Virtual University, Kaunas University of Technology, Mykolas Romeris University, Siauliai University, Vilnius Law and Business College.

In this paper the distance learning at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University will be presented.

The e-learning courses at the Department of Construction Economics and Property Management of the Faculty of Civil Engineering of VGTU were introduced in September of 1999. 27 students from all over Lithuania were accepted into the Real Estate Valuation program. Most of them were people working in the real estate sector. Since 2003 the Real Estate Valuation and Management program contains two major subjects: Real Estate Management and Internet Technologies and Real Estate Business. Since 2000 students can enroll in Construction Management e-learning course selecting Construction Economics and Management as a major subject (Rimkuvienė, Lepkova, 2004).

All program materials are available as printed program notes which are enhanced, where appropriate, to take advantage of modern teaching techniques and delivery mechanisms. In particular, the following media are used in specific modules: electronic format of the textbooks, video, computer software, computer learning systems, computer conferencing, computer networks, and 'face-to-face' contact. Study materials are prepared with reference to Great Britain, Germany, the USA and other countries' experience (Kaklauskas et al, 2002). Electronic format of the textbooks is provided on CD (see Figure 3) and also available in virtual environment on distance learning web-site.



CD for students enrolled in Construction Economics and Business program (1 specialization)

CDs for students enrolled in Real Estate Valuation and Management (2 specialisations)

Figure 3

Electronic format of textbooks and video- and audio- material for students prepared in CD

DISTANCE LEARNING MARKETING AT VILNIUS GEDIMINAS TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

In this part of article the main attention will be paid on advertising part of marketing. The main focus made on distance learning in Lithuania and the possible customers – distance learning students.

The main sources of information about Distance learning studies at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University are following:

- Internet (websites of university, distance learning centre and etc).
- Newspapers.
- Flyers, distributed during the exhibitions, also sent to possible customers by email and surface post.

- Participation in exhibitions (focused on specific topics).
- People advice.

In figure: 4, the distance learning advertisement at VGTU is presented. It can be seen the picture from the exhibition center, where the authors of paper were presenting distance learning at VGTU, using flyers, video and other material; internet website and the example of the advertisement of distance learning at VGTU in press.

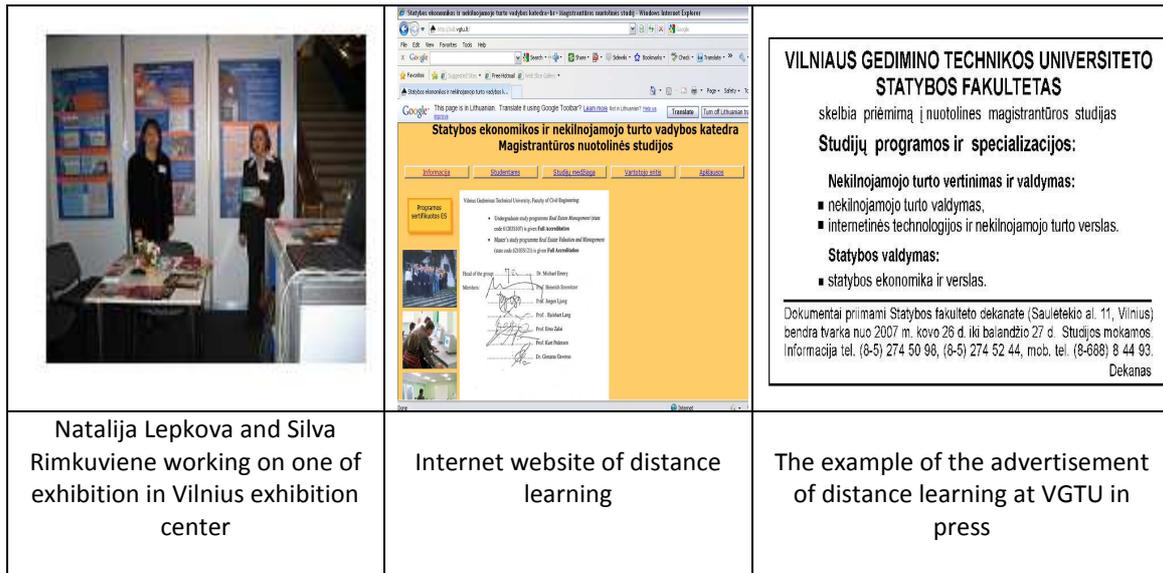


Figure 4
 Distance learning advertisement at VGTU

In order to clarify a number of issues related to the efficiency of advertising the 2 survey researches were conducted. The first research has been fulfilled in 2003 year, at the beginning of distance learning studies at VGTU. 125 respondents took part in a questioning. The results of first research were published in scientific journals and proceeding books (Rimkuvienė, et al, 2004; Lepkova, et al, 2006). The second research has been fulfilled in 2009 year. 86 respondents took part in a questioning. The reliability and efficiency of information about distance studies is an important research object.

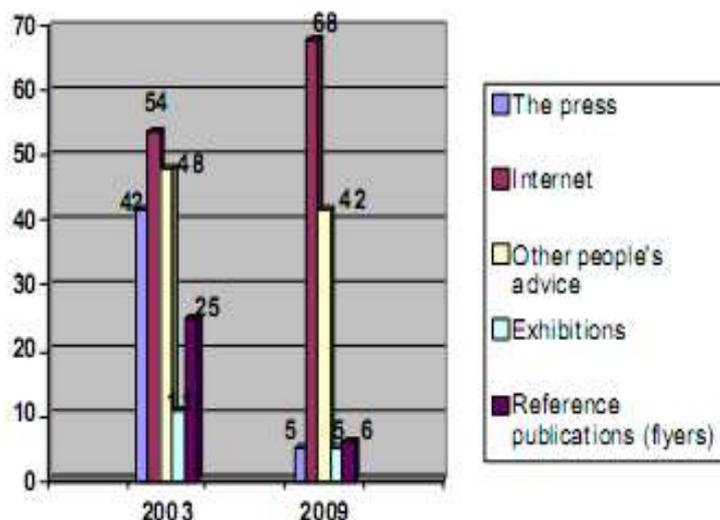


Figure 5

Respondents' opinions about the reliability of sources of information

The students were asked about where they found the information about distance learning at the Department of Construction Economics and Property Management. It should be noted that in their answers to this question the respondents were allowed to specify several options (see Figure 5).

As can be seen from this analysis, the Internet is considered the most efficient source of information. The second most popular source is other people's advice, the third – information published in newspapers, etc (see Figure: 5).

CONCLUSIONS

- Distance learning plays an important role in all education system in Lithuania.
- The distance learning at Vilnius Gediminas technical University has developed rapidly and students very interested in such form of study.
- The good marketing of distance learning has a great influence on students' interest in distance education.
- Internet is considered the most efficient source of information. The second most popular source is other people's advice, the third – information published in newspapers.

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