EEPG Marketing Network Meeting in Vilnius, 24-25 May 2007

Participants

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23.05, Wednesday

Welcome dinner in the evening, hosted by Alma Littera/Šviesa

24.05, Thursday

Morning session

Topic: Organization of marketing within the company (presentations by the participants and discussion of advantages and problems of the different structures).

Tomas Mikalonis (Alma Littera/Šviesa) presented the history and background of the marketing department in Alma Littera/Šviesa. He indicated the different functions of the department, e.g. analyse textbook publishing needs; initiate articles in the pedagogical press (they have an agreement with the biggest pedagogical journal to have one page in every issue this year); develop and present the image of the publishing house; present and promote about 10 new textbooks per year (at local seminars where the dates are always coordinated with the centres of education); establish a centre of training the teachers who after such courses get a certificate of qualification. Sometimes there can be problems or discussions between the publishing department and the marketing department when it comes to the planning of future publications. Tomas presented the criteria for selecting which textbooks should be introduced to the market (e.g. competitive ability, parts of a set, potential of authors to go to seminars). Furthermore Tomas described in detail how they organise the activities around sales promotion, e.g. they make special promotions for workbooks (the textbooks are to 90% paid by the government) through PR campaigns towards teachers and parents indicating the importance of workbooks for the learning process. A new product is a special book for teachers to keep up with the learning progress of each pupil (e.g. tables to enter the individual marks of the learners). Another special case is the fact that very popular cakes were sent to every school on teacher's day in October [please click here to see the presentation].

There followed a discussion about workbooks which are very often copied because the pupils are not allowed to write in the workbooks owned by the schools.

Elena Pataki (Patakis Publishers) explained that their marketing managers work very closely together with the editorial people. The marketing people plan the advertising activities based on the solid knowledge they have about the product. Marketing people take part in the decisions about new products and are close to editorial people throughout the editing phase. They do not organise so many seminars, partly because the books are not compulsory (the state give the compulsory textbooks for free to the schools). Patakis are more interested in presenting the Patakis logo so the students and the teachers know and respect the name when they later buy or order books. Earlier they had representatives inside the schools, but now they only have such persons engaged regarding materials for foreign languages. They always produce not mandatory materials. The private schools can buy the state published books very cheap in the bookshops, so the main aim for the company is to raise the profile of Patakis. In addition they advertise in national newspapers, TV, radio etc.

Maruša Kmet (Rokus Klett Publishing House) presented the organisation of the marketing department at Rokus Klett including market research, marketing for magazines, sales and marketing, and promotion department. For marketing...
same structure and layout for all groups of subjects). Persons from the different departments work together on teams for specific projects like preparing special events, promotion activities etc. The main advantages of this approach include team work, creativity and flexibility. The problems, however, are placement of responsibility, correspondence (e.g. who takes care of contacts with which schools and persons after the event), cost control can often be complicated with so many persons involved.[Please click here to see the presentation].

Maire Tänna (Koolibri Publishers) described the relatively small marketing department which has two marketing managers, one for schools and nursery schools while the other takes care of book stores. In addition they have 3 sales agencies, and three internal persons have telephone contact with the schools (sending bills and catalogues and promotion materials). Responsibilities of the marketing manager (for schools and nursery schools) include preparing the catalogue, sending sample books to the schools, organise presentations of new textbooks and organise short courses (seminars). Maire’s experience with such promotion seminars is by the way that wine and food does not help the sales if the book is bad! The sales reps work in three regions of Estonia. They advertise, meet the teachers and work as an agency for the publishing house. A new and good development in Estonia is that the government will now also pay for exercise books for primary (and not only textbooks as usual)[Please click here to see the presentation].

Vija Kilbloka (Zvaigzne ABC Publishers) explained the Latvian situation, where there has been a disastrous decrease of the number of children being born. But this is slowly changing to the better now. Schools purchase books in small quantities because government funding is still significant (although the Ministry has promised an increase in funding from the state). The funding is still only 2 euro per pupil per year, they have promised 4 euro. Zvaigzne publish two quarterly magazines, one for primary school teachers, another for secondary and upward, in addition they have an agreement with a weekly newspaper (Education and Culture) where they have once a month a whole page informing about their textbooks. There are school information centres with seminars for teachers and librarians and additional teachers’ courses. They also have mobile exhibitions around to schools all over the country. As part of the marketing activities they have established 15 bookshops across the country – often in connection with the education centres [Please click here to see the presentation].

Matilda Tomas (Profil International) described the organisation of marketing within the company. For promotion and marketing of schoolbooks they have three departments: education, marketing and promoters. The schools department has 70 persons in the staff. They organise workshops and seminars for teachers and special events like theatre and concerts for teachers. Marketing includes advertising, catalogues, teacher competitions, teachers’ club, games for pupils etc. The promoters have communication with the teachers and principals in the schools. They also organise individual presentations of books and additional materials. In addition they supply teachers with all necessary materials throughout the school year (e.g. they bring free copies directly to the teachers!) [Please click here to see the presentation].

Manfred Meraner (Veritas Verlag) described the organisation of Veritas. In the marketing department most of the time is spent on being part of the call centre where the phones are ringing all the time. Special activities include direct marketing, sales and service for booksellers, presentations, customer service, and marketing coordinators for groups of subjects. In addition there is a special department for creating the web site, and finally there are persons specialised in sales of journals. In the overall planning the production strategies play a very important role – they plan here three to four years ahead. All the different departments put in and take out information using a specific software platform – so everybody is always able to work in accordance with the overall strategy. The key problems are for example if there is enough knowledge about the market and the products, market research etc. The general solution in Veritas is to work along the lines of project management – i.e. all activities are put together in projects [Please click here to see the presentation].

Afternoon session

Topic: Marketing and finances: In what areas of the marketing activities is it possible to save costs? In which areas is saving money (almost) impossible?

Elena Pataki (Patakis Publishers) mentioned that sending many free copies is quite expensive and the money could be saved by not sending all copies to all teachers e.g. only send catalogues, or give it for free through bookshops.

Maire Tänna (Koolibri Publishers) stressed the importance of timing with reference to Koolibri’s ABC book which arrived at the wrong time – and could in the first year not be sold, although the book was excellent in every respect. However, later it appeared that the book was accepted by the teachers and began to change into a success after all – more information on this below!

Maruša Kmet (Rokus Klett Publishing House) gave some important hints as to saving costs in different phases of the marketing activities which gave a sound basis for the following debate [please click here to see the presentation].

Matilda Tomas (Profil International) indicated as one way of saving money that they have tried to send a package of books to the principal who delivered them to the relevant teachers – instead of direct mail to the individual teachers.

One conclusion is maybe that free copies are a rather expensive but efficient tool for marketing and advertising. A
them catalogues as well? Catalogues are good because they inform about additional materials which is not sent together with the free copies.

**Topic: Example of a successful campaign (contributions from the participants)**

Matilda Tomas (Profil International) presented a successful campaign based on the two series of books for English ‘Building Blocks’ (grade 1 to 4 with CDs, workbook, flash cards, posters, teacher’s book, etc.) and ‘Building Bridges’ (grade 5 to 8). The main features include motivation, creativity, personalisation, learning to learn. More precise definitions of the advantages are to be found in the presentation. The authors have attended more than 100 seminars across Croatia presenting the products. There are extra materials available for free on the company web site, and the free gifts in general include balls, bags, puppets, stickers etc. During the whole year pupils can write to the ‘rabbit Ronnie’ who answers all letters. In addition they have organised a competition for grades 5-8 to make a school newspaper in English [please click here to see the presentation].

Vija Kilbloka (Zvaigzne ABC Publishers) first described Zvaigzne’s 15 bookshops. Here they have among other activities arranged a campaign called ‘summer reading’ where the readers should by a certain (small) number of textbooks at a reduced price. With the purchase they participated in a lottery to win a car (sponsored by Volkswagen). Another campaign has been ‘bankruptcy prices’ in November with prices of books like in the sixties. This has been a tremendous success – and is certainly to be repeated [please click here to see the presentation].

Ruta Navikaitė (Alma Littera/Šviesa) presented a new literature course book for grade 10. First part of the book has been sent to 1,070 schools. The expenditure of the promotional action was around 4,500 euro in total. The company took about 20% of the market in one year, and next year they hope for 50% market share because the teachers have received the book so well. Ruta told a similar good story about a Maths book for grade 11: They invited 12 Maths teachers from across the country, who were instructed by the authors on how to use the book, and later 29 seminars were organised. Finally Ruta explained the background for books for Lithuanian language where they are alone on the market, but in order to make sure that no competitors will enter this market they have sent out competing books. A long series of seminars for teachers have advertised well for these books [please click here to see the presentation].

Maire Tänna (Koolibri Publishers) presented a story which is both a successful and a not so successful story, namely the story of ‘AABITS’ (an Estonian ABC book). It was launched in 2005 with festive events (opera, video, lots of media engaged, lots of free copies etc.) But the first order was only 301 copies, after one whole year only 1,000 copies sold – not good enough! Probable reason: teachers do not want to change their teaching materials. By now they have sold around 4,600 copies in total – and why this change to the more positive? Seminars were organised across the country, and slowly the changes are coming: 4,600 copies is very good sales figure for a country the size of Estonia. So the big event is not the point, but the everyday seminars really work. 4,600 copies equals 30% market share [please click here to see the presentation].

**Evening: Social event**

*The participants were invited on a guided ship tour in the lake near Trakai, and after visiting the famous castle they had Dinner in the restaurant „Apvalaus stalo klubas“ in Trakai.*

25.05, Friday

**Morning session**

**Topic: Example of a not so successful campaign (contributions from the participants)**

Manfred Meraner (Veritas Verlag) first talked about a successful campaign for the Maths book called ‘Mathematix’. So far Veritas had never been successful in Maths. The unique selling propositions (USPs) of this product include new concept, differentiation, and exercises for all levels. The campaign was not overwhelming, i.e. no extravagant events, just short plain seminars for teachers. The package includes workbook, book with solutions, teacher’s planning guide and a CD-ROM for teachers and a CD-ROM for the students. Reasons for success: the book as such was good, and it was very well presented by the authors.

Not so successful was the German primer ‘Meine Fibel’ from Veritas. One year after launch the main competitor made a relaunch of an old success from the fifties – in a modernised version, Veritas organised numerous user workshops (for teachers who had bought the book); they gave away audio CDs (with newly composed songs for the book) as gifts to all users; they arranged 12 expensive presentations (with video, moderator). Main reasons for failure probably include the relaunch by the competitor, and maybe the too complex package (using different media) for the teachers [please click here to see the presentation].

Matilda Tomas (Profil International) mentioned a not so successful campaign for a textbook for musical culture for grades 1-3. The package includes textbook, teacher’s book, 3 CDs with musical examples and posters. However, seen in the light of recent increase in sales the campaign might develop into a success after all [please click here to see the presentation].
Maruša Kmet (Rokus Klett Publishing House) presented the Maths book ‘IGRA’ for grade 4. Before launching they conducted marketing research among 100 Maths teachers, and the content was perfect from a didactic and methodological perspective, simple language, illustrations, etc. The problem was, however, that it was published too late: they organised seminars and workshops in April – hoping for the launch in April. So they gave away samples (with the cover and few pages inside) while waiting, but the book was actually only published in June – 2 months too late. Lesson learnt: right timing is vital [please click here to see the presentation].

Tomas Mikalonis (Alma Littera/Šviesa) gave an overview of a campaign for an English learning course book, this is by the way a market with strong foreign competitors like Pearson, Oxford etc.). Alma Littera is the only language publisher in Lithuania – all others are foreign publishers. The company has already published textbooks for English for grades 2 to 4. The course book in question, called ‘Super English 1’, was for grade 5 with a student’s book, activity book, teacher’s book, tests, and CD. The marketing tools were for example articles in newspapers, 33 seminars for teachers, and promotional material sent to all schools in the country. Results: in 2006 they sold only sold 1,544 copies, in 2007 around 900 copies have been reserved. The reasons for this failure are e.g. that the children change school between grade 4 and grade 5, so the teachers are not sure about which books they have used before and therefore they choose the safe way, i.e. native materials (produced by the foreign publishers). The teachers do not know that many children have actually used materials from Alma Littera for English in grades 2-4 (where Alma Littera has 80% of the market) [please click here to see the presentation].

Afternoon session

Semiotics and cultural perspectives of titles, colours and the covers of textbooks

Preben Spåth gave a short introduction to the basics of semiotics and then described the elements of the so called visual grammar. Using these semiotic elements from basics like dot, line, shape, through colour to composition, structure, visual space etc. he gave sample analysis of some of the book covers of the schoolbooks participating in this year’s competition for the EEPG Best Schoolbooks Awards. Finally the participants tried a hands-on analysis of the schoolbooks from their own company, and these analyses were then commented by Preben.

Summary and looking ahead; topics for the next meeting

Since time was running fast (and since Alma Littera offered the participants a guided walk to the most important building in Vilnius in the late afternoon) it as unanimously decided to postpone the last topic of the agenda (ICT in marketing) the meeting next year.

Regarding the topics for the coming meeting (which is planned to take place in May 2008in Riga) the following items were suggested:

1) How to use ICT in marketing (direct e-mail, on-line presentations, invitations to presentations, showing ICT version of parts of the textbooks etc.)

2) How to assure that the authors are motivated or can physically be present at promotion seminars – if not, who does the presentation?

3) Quality principles used to analyse selected (chapters from) textbooks

4) Marketing activities in order to hold an existing market share (part of the successful and non-successful stories), including good ideas from competitors

Everybody agreed that the organisation done by Lina and Tomas had been excellent (including the weather!). On behalf of all participants I wish to thank the hostess and the host for their contributions to making this meeting another success in the history of the Marketing Network.

Preben Spåth