Chapter III

A Case Study on Education Networks and Brokerage

Gunnar Martin, German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence, Germany

Oliver Bohl, University of Kassel, Germany

August-Wilhelm Scheer, German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence, Germany

Udo Winand, University of Kassel, Germany

Abstract

In the context of the development on the educational market—which is especially influenced by an increasing importance of knowledge in society—universities and professors stand the chance to serve existing customer segments better and to develop new business segments. Experiences made in traditional teaching as well as in the field of e-learning and e-teaching facilitate a target group-specific configuration of educational services and offers with academic contents according to the principle of “assembling on demand.” Educational contents and services can be distributed beyond the physical barriers of the university to globally acting target groups and customer segments. Acquired core competencies and approved marketable educational services can be transformed into profits and economic success. Despite these promising market conditions, the active participation of universities on
the global education market is insufficient. This chapter describes in terms of a case study different action alternatives, especially but not exclusively, for the German-speaking area, which can put public universities in the position to be able to transfer their competencies to the further education market, which is globalizing and increasing in competition, and thus market their competencies. Starting points for a new positioning and the development of a profile in the educational sector are shown by the example of an e-learning network and brokerage model among universities.

Introduction

Structure of the Education Network WINFOLine

The development of the market for educational trainings, which is especially influenced by an increasing importance of knowledge in society, forces universities to serve existing customer segments better and to develop new business segments. Existing experiences made in traditional teaching as well as in technology-enhanced learning (TEL; e-learning) and teaching facilitate a target group-specific configuration of academic contents according to the principle of “assembling on demand.”

The education network WINFOLine (http://www.winfoline.de) serves as an example for the design, marketing, and distribution of academic, e-learning-based educational offers in the field of information systems, which will be presented in this chapter. The co-operation contributes to the reformation of university structures and was funded in 1997 by four professors of information systems in University of Leipzig, University of the Saarland, University of Goettingen, and University of Kassel. These partners constitute the WINFOLine core consortium. Initially, from 1997-2001, the project was funded by the German Bertelsmann foundation and the Heinz-Nixdorf foundation. In the beginning, WINFOLine started with designing and building e-learning-enhanced academic courses in terms of Web-based trainings, which were integrated in the curricula of all the participating universities. Thus, an inter-universities network for the consensual exchange of educational contents and services was created in partnership (Bohl, Grohmann, & Martin, 2002).

From 2001-2003, WINFOLine was funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research and was focusing on the aspects of broadening the network (more than 20 new partners from academia and industry were integrated), of broadening the spectrum of marketable educational contents and services, therefore a master degree and other more granular offers were created, and last but not least of achieving a sustainable maintenance of the project. Since 2004, WINFOLine is financed by revenue streams created from different sources: the non-monetary engagement of the participating partners is still important; most of them are still remunerated only on a basic level, that is, not in line with the market. Furthermore, the offered educational services and contents help to finance an employee who is responsible for the administration of the “Executive Master Degree Program.”

To ensure the sustainability of WINFOLine, a content and educational product pool forms the center of the education network (see Figure 1).