

Guide for increasing the attractiveness of vocational education

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Introduction

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION NEEDS more students and working life needs more competent workers. Due to this, the attractiveness of vocational education should be maintained and increased further. This requires positive communication and marketing while utilising methods and various channels that take into account the diversity of the target group.

For this guide, we have gathered operational models that helped us increase the attractiveness of vocational education in Southwest Finland in the field of mechanical and industrial engineering, which is generally considered a challenging field. The number of applicants doubled and, more importantly, the number of enrolled students who dropped out decreased significantly. The most important factors of success were the young people studying in the field. They designed the marketing materials, participated in the implementation of events and forwarded the positive message through their own channels. Even though the field in question was mechanical and industrial engineering, we believe that these models can be used in any field.

The guide in your hand is a collection of various good practices and operational models that promote the attractiveness of vocational education, which you can also put to the test in your own educational institute.

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1 *FANTASTIC FUTURE WITH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION*

The teachers, companies and students may have slightly different priorities when it comes to vocational education. How to communicate in a way that would emphasise the best and most interesting points of all the parties? What is the primary goal of an educational institute's marketing and how to serve different audiences?

When the purpose is to advertise the field to future students, you should trust that the young people who have already chosen the field will know what interests other young people. You should give the young people a chance to choose the method of marketing. They know what drew them into the field. And they also know what kind of reputation the field and your educational institute have among the youth. They have the newest knowledge on what channels and what kind of content are the most effective way to communicate with future students right now. Trust in the experiences of these young people and ask their opinion.

For the educational institute, the purpose of marketing is, naturally, to have more students, but it also increases professional pride and promotes the brand of the field for the young people already studying it. When the students have an opportunity to influence the marketing content of the field, they also commit to working as representatives of the field. Marketing the educational institute and the field is also great training for entrepreneurship as well as communication and social skills.

Social media as a marketing tool – not random posting, but systematic communication!

It is easy to market your field and educational institute by utilising the various social media channels. In order to succeed in social media, however, you need skills, a systematic approach and some time.

When establishing a channel or managing one, keep in mind:

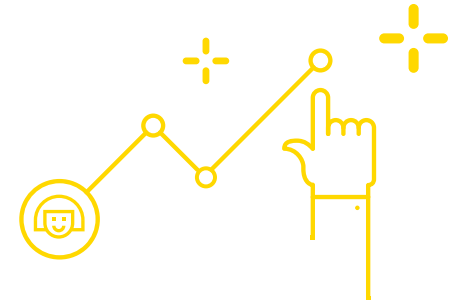
- › Make sure you know exactly what you want to say about your field in your posts. Collect the theses and produce or loan the stories supporting them.
- › The channels have different audiences, and the messages need to be tailored to the target audience. At the moment, Facebook and Twitter are better channels for adults, guardians and teachers, whereas younger people can be better reached through Instagram or Snapchat.
- › Take into account the special characteristics of each channel: on the institute's homepage, a story can be similar to a newspaper article; in Facebook, posts with just a few sentences are best, combined with images; for Instagram you need great hashtags; and Snapchat is device-specific and requires frequent updating.
- › You should also network with other operators in the field in social media and follow, like and share stories that support your cause and field. Not all content has to be created by you.

- › Plan the framework or a year clock in advance. E.g. on Facebook you can publish posts two or three times a week, and on Instagram you can publish every day. What events should be taken into account? When should you invest money in the adverts? What kind of publications have received the most follows, shares and likes?

- › You can also hold competitions that encourage people to participate, which gives you new followers or activates the existing ones. However, you should keep in mind that there are laws, regulations and policies related to competitions (as well as to publishing the photos of others).

- › Young social media users know what works and what inspires other young people. Allow them to compile and plan contents (see section Rep work). However, agree on the rules and policies first. Monitor the channels.

- › One channel may have several updaters. In such cases, contents should be designed together and posts need to be scheduled.



On Facebook, posts can be scheduled in advance. Get some social media training for yourself and other updaters and ensure that you have access to easy-to-use devices and programs.

- › Marketing and communications is more than social media. They can also include roll-ups, events, T-shirts, press releases, posters, brochures, articles in the journals of the field, stickers, logos... Nothing rules out the others and not all eggs should be put in one basket.



Dealing with Public Relations

Students of mechanical and industrial engineering were recruited to come up with ideas for the marketing of their field and to market their field themselves to future students. A Facebook group named Edustushommis (Dealing with PR) was established for several different educational institutes, where the students branded the field and discussed marketing methods. Marketing workshops were arranged for the young people, which were led by marketing professionals. The young people found it interesting to visit other educational institutes during the workshops, comparing their day-to-day life with their own. Marketing campaigns at students' own old schools were seen as fun, as the students had the chance to visit their old teachers and the pupils.

WHY?

- › Young people know what interests other young people.
- › They can come up with marketing methods the adults would not have considered. For example, they can be more knowledgeable about the current phenomena in social media.
- › Other young people may find it easier to approach them than an adult, for example during fairs or other presentations.
- › They remember better which are the important factors when selecting a profession or a field, and their fresh personal experiences make it easier for them to empathise with the pupils.
- › The students in the field that took part in representative work will also have a better image of their field and their professional pride will grow.
- › Presentation skills will improve. These duties can also be included in studies, for example as a part of communication and social skills.
- › The young person's own social networks will spread a positive image of the field efficiently.
- › The contents that work best in social media are ones that follow the life and actions of a certain student > personality and giving the field a face work. The content does not always have to be strictly professional; normal, everyday life is also interesting.

PLEASE NOTE!

- › When it is decided that the students will maintain social media channels, supervision, encouragement and shared agreements on the content – and sometimes also marketing training – are needed.
- › Several meetings with the same group will yield good results, when the courage to work together and share one's opinion grows.

Young people in charge of planning marketing communication – Fantastic future as a result

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Right at the beginning of the project, we decided that we want the young people studying mechanical and industrial engineering in vocational college to become involved in the plans on how their peers could be attracted to the field. I was called in as a trainer, and the objective was to teach young people the basics of marketing communication. The challenge was that even though the young people had a great deal of motivation and knowledge, the conceptualisation of complete ideas is challenging if the basics of communication and marketing are not familiar.

Through workshop-based activities, we started to review the following matters:

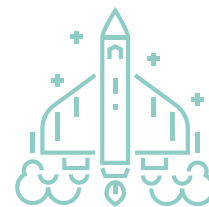
› How can we reach the young people? What

channels do they use?

- › What attitudes and beliefs do the young people have on the jobs and studies of mechanical and industrial engineering?
- › How did the students of the field make their choice and what motivates them about it?
- › What kinds of photos, videos, texts and adverts do the young people like?

With the help of the young people we were able to find out that there were many prejudices about mechanical and industrial engineering and its studies, which were based on incorrect beliefs. These prejudices affected the young people themselves, but they also reflected on the guidance counsellors.

The young people said that they had applied



“
The students had a great deal of motivation to take part in promoting the reputation of their field.”



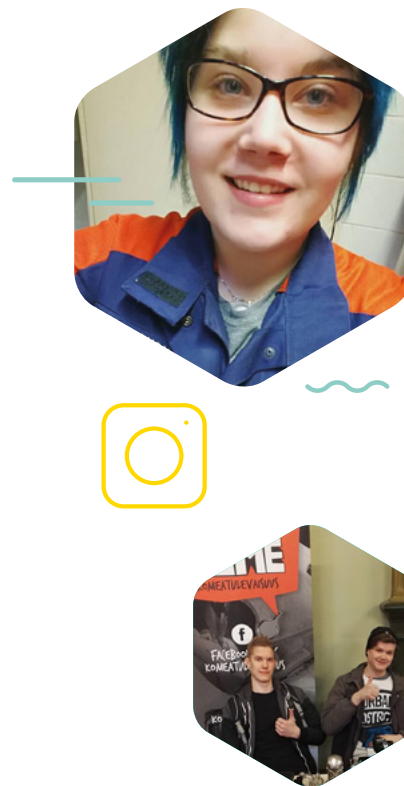
for their studies after being inspired by their parent or a summer job, for example. Good pupils may have heard from the guidance counsellor of their school that they should apply elsewhere.

For example, the following prejudices came to light:

- › The work is dirty and heavy
- › Only pupils with poor grades who are not accepted elsewhere apply
- › The pay is not good
- › The work is mainly suitable for men
- › The metal industry is old-fashioned

However, the students themselves were proud of their field, even though these prejudices annoyed them. As pros of their field, the students brought up the following:

- › Short but multifaceted education
- › The pay is good and there are plenty of jobs available
- › Various career paths are enabled
- › They can work with great projects
- › Work can be creative too: welders, for



example, can show off their good welds on Instagram

- › The work utilises plenty of robotics

The students had a great deal of motivation to take part in promoting the reputation of their field. Due to this, the objective was to break these prejudices and promote the reputation of the mechanical and metal industry. The young people were assigned a role, to which they referred as “dealing with PR”. They were asked to share photos in the project’s social media channels and tell about their school days. Some started to also write blogs.

With the help of workshops, plenty of important information was collected from the young people to support the audience analysis. These workshops also gave the young people more confidence and they also dared to make some suggestions and tell about their own field with pride. Some did not want to directly publish materials, but they shared photos and suggestions through a closed Facebook group, which was utilised for social media marketing ideas.



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WELCOME TO STUDY WITH US



Young people also value attention and being seen as important. When a former pupil of the upper stage of a comprehensive school feels welcome in a new educational institute, they will share their experiences with their friends in the old school. Through the grapevine, these stories will spread and benefit the vocational institute. The choices that the slightly older friends have made are carefully considered and pupils find the stories about student life very interesting.

Paying attention to a future student before their studies start reinforces the choice they have made and helps them commit to the educational institute. Visiting the future school will alleviate the stress of starting studies, when the students know where they are coming to and will see some of their fellow students and new teachers.

Open door events are familiar to many educational institutes and they are a great way to present the school operations and field's studies to the pupils of the upper stages of comprehensive school. In addition to this, pupils can make more specific and longer visits to vocational institutes, for example for student experiments and introduction to working life periods.

The image we give about the studied field is an important factor when a young person makes their choices. We should therefore offer them a chance to picture different professions and educational institutes and dream about a new and great future.



Introduction period to working life in cooperation with a vocational institute

Utilise the work experience periods of comprehensive school's upper stage pupils in building the reputation of your institute. The vocational schools have contacts to the companies in the field, and by taking part in the periods of school pupils, you can make it clear which path takes them to the vocation of their choice. This is perfect for fields where the jobs do not have much visibility and where the pupils do not necessarily have a clear idea on what certain professions include.

In certain fields, it can be hard to come up with meaningful activities for the pupil for the whole week. In such cases, the pupil can stay with the company for a part of the week and the rest at the vocational institute, participating in the teaching of the industry, or they can work at two different companies.

The educational institutes often have their own services, such as training restaurants, sewing workshops and car workshops. These companies can also offer places for introduction periods to working life.

1.

Contact the comprehensive school, upper stage, in your area, for example the guidance counsellor. Find out the periods of the 8th and 9th grades.

2.

Request to come in to speak to and share information with the future pupils and present the companies and trades that the pupils could try. Review the number of interested pupils and consider how many pupils you could accept or for how many you could find a suitable company.

3.

Contact the suitable companies and compile a plan about how to implement the week.

ATTENTION!

- › When there are several “employers”, who will provide the pupils with work clothes and meals, and who will give them feedback and sign the contract? Remember that the working days of minors are shorter. A vocational institute student, who is doing their on-the-job learning period in the company, can also act as the tutor of the pupil. This may make it easier to get companies involved.
- › Ask and request feedback about the period and give feedback to the pupil. Remember to forward the feedback to the partner company, too.

Technology agents at work

The objective of this model is to increase the awareness of comprehensive school pupils and secondary school students as well as the guidance personnel of schools and educational institutes about the technology industry and the opportunities it provides.



1.

Contact the guidance counsellor of the comprehensive school or secondary school in your region and suggest cooperation.

2.

Train the students in presentation skills and marketing (they need to be able to present their matter clearly but in a relaxed manner).

3.

Training structure:

- a) Content training that reviews the key matters of the field
- b) Sales training for practising selling the cause to the audience
- c) Peer coaching, in which the students give feedback to each other. Find support for training and coaching from the communication professionals of your institute.

4.

Reward your students

Working life expert in general education

WHY THIS NEW JOB?

- › there are too few young people interested in science and mathematics
- › the needs of the labour market now and in the future
- › especially the need of more students in technology fields

Mathematics and science teachers in comprehensive schools and upper secondary schools are highly educated but they might not know enough of what working life demands. Youngsters in general education don't fully understand that mathematics is needed in many fields of working life and also in future studies.

WORK OF WORKING LIFE EXPERT

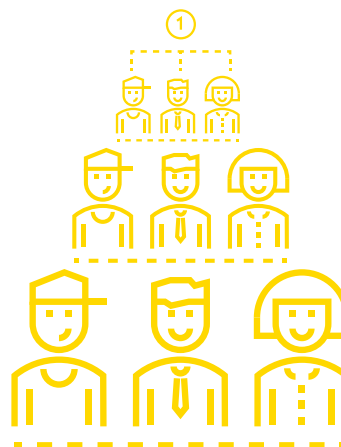
- › The main goal is to raise awareness of the possibilities of mathematics and science in general education.
- › Working life expert works very closely with teachers and study counsellors – plans together with them the new ways / models / solutions that make mathematics more concrete and interesting.
- › Visits to companies, involving older students (using them as examples) and employers – these at least are the working models.



Evening for priority applicants (Just for you)

WHY?

- › The young person feels valued: development of professional identity starts here.
- › Starting studies at a new school is not too daunting when the place is familiar and the student feels welcome.
- › The young person will meet their future fellow students.
- › The guardians will also have the opportunity to ask the teachers questions about the field and about studies in a vocational school.



1.

Send an invitation to applicants and their guardians to come and see the new school.

2.

Reserve a time and a place as well as a few tutor students and an entrepreneur from the field as guest speakers. Decide whether you want to serve coffee, etc.

3.

Think about how the evening will proceed: explain the structure of studies, tell about the future working life, costs and on-the-job learning as well as any other aspects that are different to the young person's previous schooling.

4.

Give the floor to a tutor student studying the subject: They can tell about things that interest young people about their new school.

5.

Instruct the entrepreneur also to speak in a way that enables a young person or a guardian, who is unfamiliar with the field, to understand what is talked about.

6.

Present the most important locations in the school and explain where the students need to come to in the autumn.

ATTENTION!

- › Young people do not use email, a traditional letter may draw their attention.
- › The participants should be requested to register in the event, but in a way that is easy for a young person, for example with a text message.
- › If you wish for the guardians to participate, the event should be held during the evening.
- › A future student will surely be most interested in the next few school years; working life is a distant future to them. Focus on representing the school's day-to-day life.
- › Remember that positive things go through the grapevine at comprehensive school, when a future student tells their friends that they have visited a vocational institute.





VISIBILITY TO WORKING LIFE



It is important to make visible for students and possible future students the purpose of education and the kind of competence that is needed in working life. The companies are interested in gaining motivated, competent work force.

The educational institutes and companies in the field should move together in the same direction. Because the students are the most important resource of educational institutes, the different companies should also be visible in their day-to-day life. It is the duty of teachers to ensure that the students have an up-to-date image of the field's business world. In the companies, the students are in contact with the professionals whose ranks they will join after graduation.

The attractiveness of a field within the educational institute is boosted by good connections to working life and interesting companies, from which the students have personal experience. One part of professional competence is to be familiar with the companies of the field, especially on a local level.



Every day is an enterprise day

Company visits and/or expert lectures will be held for the students every week (or every month or at the end of every period). For the students, this event is a learning situation. A quiz will be compiled for every visit, to which the students attempt to find the answers during the visit.

WHY?

During the term, the student will form a comprehensive image of the industry's companies working in the area, and during the visits they have the opportunity to be in contact with their future working life introduction places or workplaces. The entrepreneur will also have a better picture on what kinds of students there are in the educational institute and what they are interested in.



ATTENTION!

The visits take time and require changes to the timetable. In the example school, all the Wednesdays of the first year students were reserved for this purpose. The teachers that accompanied the group varied, but the visiting plans and schedules were all done by one person. Visits can be arranged with different themes within the same industry.

It is best to choose companies that can be easily reached with public transport. Otherwise transport options for the students should be considered.



1.

The planning instructor of the visit visits the company. During this meeting, the practical arrangements will be discussed and the presentation tour will be reviewed.

2.

The instructor will compile the quiz for the visitors and asks a company representative to approve it. This way, the company representative will be aware of what the educational institute expects from the visit.

3.

The instructor will publish instructions for the students concerning schedules and necessary equipment. Additionally, they will print out questions for the “toolbox” given to the visitor, which includes the quizzes as well as pencils and other necessary equipment (unless an electronic version is available, which is easy to use by phone or some other easy way). If the visit's planning instructor does not go along on the visit, they will give the details of the visit to the other instructors going along.

4.

The instructor present in the beginning of the visit will distribute the quizzes to the students and collect the named quizzes at the end of the visit.

5.

The teacher will review and grade the answers and return the quizzes to the students. The points will be marked in a table and the students with the highest score from the autumn and the spring terms will be rewarded.



Business classes in the spirit of Formula One: Sponsored teaching facilities

Offer visibility to the partner companies at the school premises

1.

Decorate classrooms or other teaching facilities with the company's colours and adverts. Some of the renovations could even be made by the students.

2.

Offer the companies a chance to bring their own products or product photos to the learning environment, for example boards and posters, vitrines, tapings on the walls...

3.

To celebrate your cooperation, hold an opening event in these premises for the students, teachers and company representatives, where you give the floor to the entrepreneur and also tell the students about the different forms of cooperation.

4.

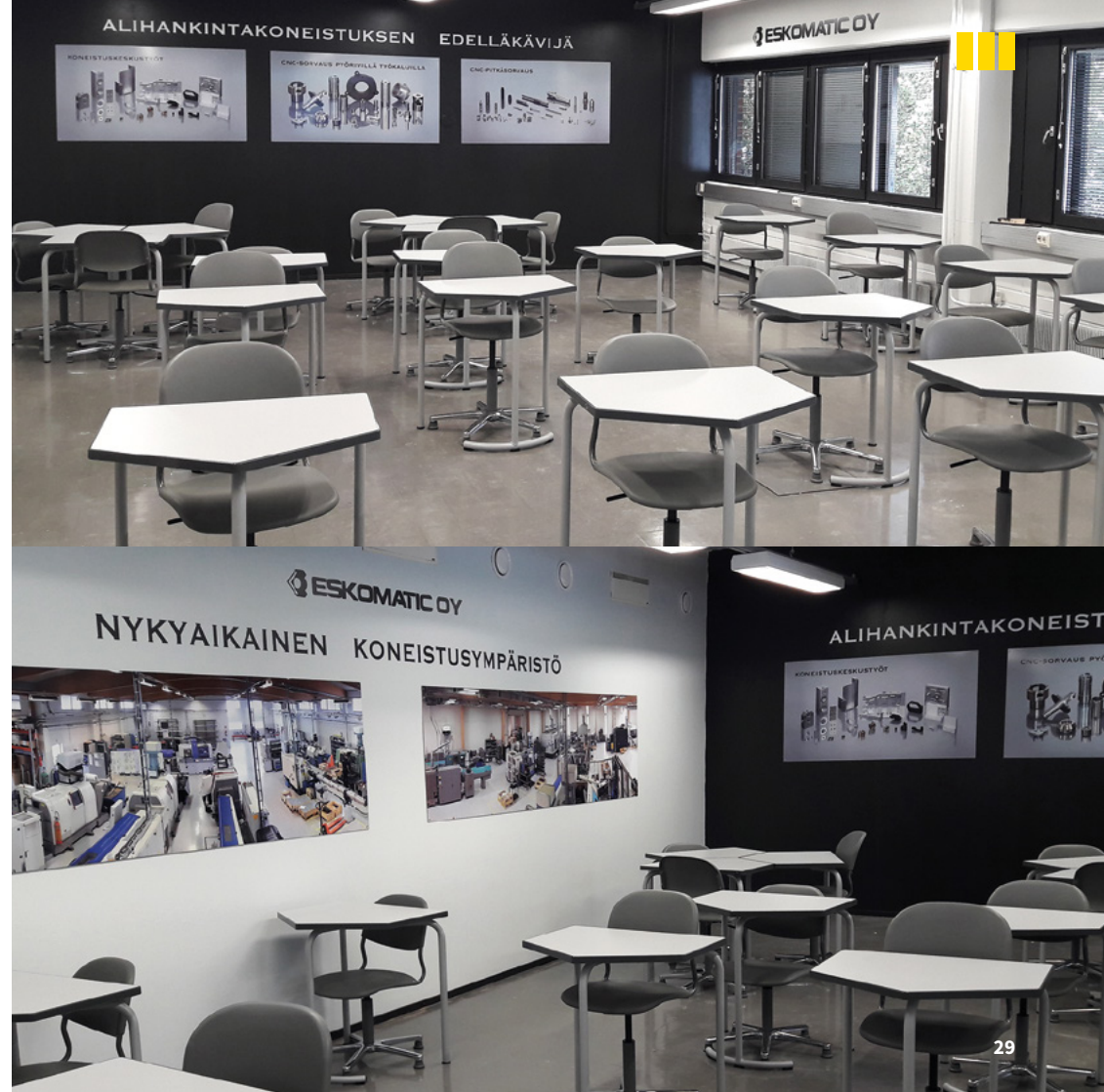
The company pays for the renovations.

5.

Increases the comfort of the environment and also affects the students' image about the industry and the company.

6.

This project should be mainly carried out during the summer so that there is enough time for the renovation and the schooling is not disrupted.





ATTENTION!

Organising birthday parties for children outside the home and around a certain theme has become more popular and there is a demand and a market niche for such a service. These birthdays will stay in the children's minds and when they later think about their studies or profession, positive experiences will guide their choices.

Theme birthdays – familiarise children with your trade!

Circus school birthdays, laser tag birthdays, princess birthdays... Why not also technology birthdays, car tuning birthdays or maybe cooking and baking birthdays! If the child has a dream job or special interest in technology or cooking, they can try their hand at these through a theme birthday party.

1. Reserve a place where the birthday is held, for example a partner company (or the school's teaching facilities). Agree on a time when these premises are available.
2. Plan what kinds of tasks 5 to 10-year-old children could do when they learn more about the field.
3. Market.
4. Involve the students of the subject and have them instruct the children, tell about their subject, and manage the schedule and safety, for example. Industries could also be combined: the catering field will provide the catering, practical nurse students will play with the children, and machine and industrial engineering students will manage the robot control track, circuit diagram competition and the crafting of a metal item.

Wake up your inner engineer!

Pupils ending their comprehensive school and students of upper secondary education may not often find a job for the whole summer, so this is the perfect time to give them a taste of vocational studies. One option is a summer course planned by a university of applied sciences, alone or in cooperation with a vocational institute. The companies of the field can also participate.

1.

Contact the comprehensive school/upper secondary school well in advance in the autumn and share the idea with them.

2.

Meet with the guidance counsellors and subject teachers and review what kinds of courses they would need. At the same time, find out if this course could be included in the studies.

3.

Take your teacher colleagues and students with you. Reserve enough time resources for planning.

4.

Starting marketing early enough is important: the idea of studying during the summer is a novelty to many and needs to be processed.

5.

Remember to also inform the parents during parent-teacher evenings.



**For more information
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