

# BRANCH CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

## *Marketing expertise required*

*International branch campuses can succeed or fail depending on whether they enrol enough students. Failure is costly – financially and for reputations. To give such a high-profile, high-risk development the best chance of success, marketing expertise must be sought and heeded throughout the project.*

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**VICKY LEWIS**

*Independent Consultant, UK*

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## International Branch Campus

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a degree-granting entity at least partially owned and operated by a foreign education provider displaying its brand<sup>1</sup>

The number of International Branch Campuses (IBCs) – also known as offshore or overseas campuses – grew enormously during the first decade of the 21st century. Although this growth has slowed more recently, the total number of IBCs now exceeds 200. While this mode of transnational education is still a minority pursuit, it has been around long enough for us to pinpoint trends and start evaluating what works.

The number of exporting and importing countries has increased (currently 29 exporters and 67 importers)<sup>2</sup> and, while

The drivers for those IBCs that have already developed into sustainable operations are grounded in strong academic and social rationales (beyond the desire for prestige or income generation). However for most, students are the lifeblood.

The decision to develop an IBC is huge, sometimes sparking controversial debates about mission and priorities with governing bodies (who authorise the funding); and among home campus staff who may feel it's a senior management 'pet project' and a distraction from 'core business'.

Financial returns may take a decade to be realised. Some planned campuses don't get off the ground at all. Some fail swiftly (there have been 28 IBC closures to date). The failures are often because student number targets are over-ambitious and enrolments fall short.

### WHERE DOES MARKETING FIT IN?

Establishing an IBC is not a project where marketing professionals can be brought in at the end and expected to recruit the required number of students. Professionals

Even if this expertise exists within the home institution, it is prudent to extend capacity by seeking additional support – from other institutions willing to share good practice, from local experts in the host country and from external advisors in relevant fields.

### THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT STAGE

Robust market intelligence must underpin the initial business case. If you're struggling to find evidence of sufficient market demand, either rethink your offer or call it a day. Certain questions need to be addressed at the earliest stage of discussions, informed by local knowledge and data. Commissioning independent market research to help quantify demand can enhance the credibility of the business case.

Questions to consider include:

- Is the academic portfolio (the one you launch with and the one you aspire to in five years' time) informed by the needs of the target market? Does it match host government priorities? What about the needs of employers in the host region?
- Are enrolment targets realistic? Which programmes should be offered in the first year? How long is the process for validating these (in home and host country) and does this leave time to promote them effectively?
- Which are your target markets – local students from the host country, those from the wider region, other international students, students from the home campus – and what proportion of each do you aim to recruit? Are all these markets accessible from the start? Do students from any of your target segments need academic or linguistic preparation?

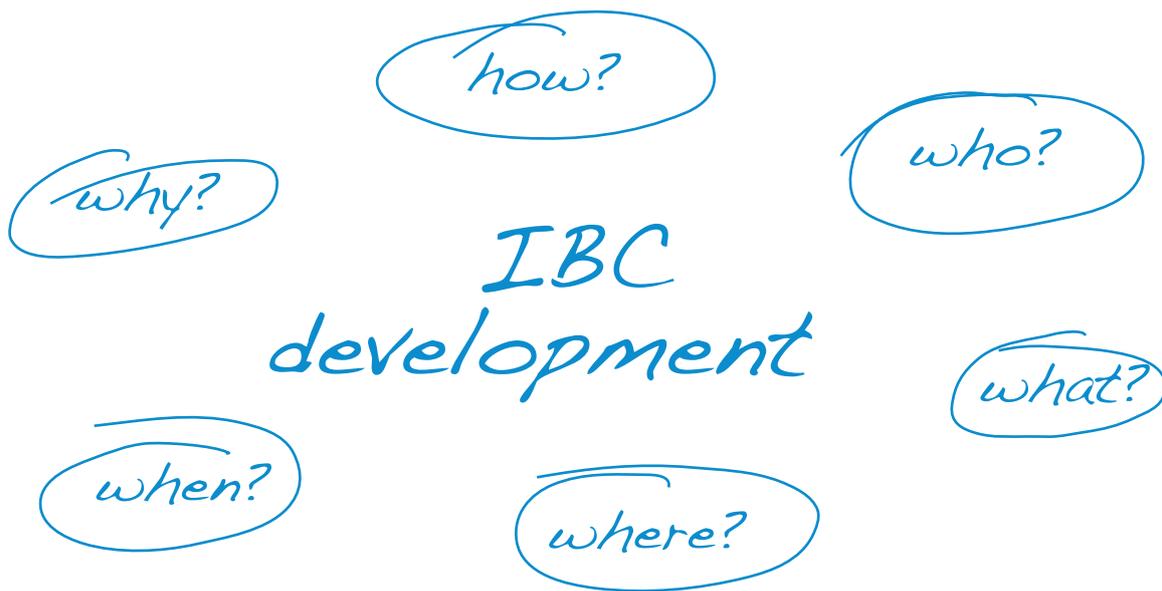
## THE TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL BRANCH CAMPUSES NOW EXCEEDS 200

many IBCs are still (mainly Anglophone) institutions from the North operating within countries in the South, there are now more North-to-North and South-to-South campuses.

Over time, some will become rounded institutions, not only delivering education, but also embracing unique research opportunities and making a contribution – economically and socially – within their host country. Some may even grow to have equivalent status to the home campus.<sup>3</sup>

with a range of marketing expertise must be at the table from the outset.

You need market research and intelligence specialists, product development strategists, corporate identity and branding experts, networkers and relationship-builders, public relations and marketing communications professionals, people who understand how to appeal to the local market, domestic and international student recruitment practitioners, and people who know how to market a start-up business.



- How are other branch campuses faring in this country? Is there any scope for collaboration?

Another point requiring serious consideration is the status of the IBC relative to the home campus. This has major repercussions for corporate identity, governance and decision-making. Is it a parent-child relationship? Will the home campus be hands-on or hands-off? Will this relationship change over time? Who makes key decisions and how are these communicated? How is the relationship presented

**THE RESOURCE ALLOCATION STAGE**

The resources needed to establish the reputation of a new IBC are significant. In commercial terms, it's a new product in a new market where awareness of the supplier is often minimal (however well-known at home). Marketing investment levels should reflect its status as a start-up business. It must be agreed how to split budget between home and branch campus. Who manages it? What staffing is required for on-the-ground marketing?

Profile-raising and marketing cannot be done from a distance on the fringes

establish a key stakeholder management plan early – and get staff out and about forging relationships to build profile and reputation. Adapt marketing activities to the local context. What seems brash or extravagant at home may be appropriate in the new market. For example, in Malaysia, big splash advertising is expected – to establish both credibility and financial stability. Listen to the local experts who know how target audiences respond to different tactics.

**MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

A key measure of success is, of course, student recruitment. Enrolling enough students is usually a prerequisite for other campus priorities to become viable. A successful IBC is, however, so much more than an exercise in getting students through the doors. It is embedded within the identity of its home campus, which it greatly enriches, and it is a key player within its local and regional context. It contributes both to home campus internationalisation and host country priorities. **E**

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**PROFILE-RAISING AND MARKETING CANNOT BE DONE FROM A DISTANCE**

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both to the local market and, crucially, to staff and students at both campuses? How can you avoid those attached to the IBC from feeling isolated and treated like 'the poor relation'?

Some universities deliberately use the locations of their IBCs in their core branding: take a look at the UK's University of Nottingham and Australia's Monash University. They are pursuing the 'multi-campus global university' route.<sup>4</sup> Then there are the logistical issues whose handling says so much about the status of the IBC. One UK university changed the time of long-standing committee meetings so that staff from the IBC could participate virtually despite an eight-hour time difference.

of home campus staff time. This requires dedicated resource and some strategic decisions: which skillsets are needed, where to locate them, who line manages them, how to facilitate cooperation between branch and home campus marketing staff, and how the staff profile will change over time (for example gradual migration of responsibilities to branch campus).

What local supplier infrastructure is needed? A roster of good photographers and video producers? A suitably trained design agency? Local support for PR or media buying?

**THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE**

When it comes to implementation,

1. Homayounpour, C., (2014, April 24). Will They Come If You Build It? The Future of International Branch Campuses. *The evollution*. Retrieved from [www.evollution.com/distance\\_online\\_learning/will-they-come-if-you-build-it-the-future-of-international-branch-campuses](http://www.evollution.com/distance_online_learning/will-they-come-if-you-build-it-the-future-of-international-branch-campuses)

2. Quick Facts. Retrieved June 3, 2014, from [www.globalhighered.org](http://www.globalhighered.org)

3. Kratochvil, D. and Karram, G. (2014, April 11). From protégé to peer – measuring maturity at branch campuses. *University World News*. Retrieved from: [www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20140408150224295](http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20140408150224295)

4. Ibid.