



Marketing Plan

2009-10

Nebraska Information Technology Commission

Education Council

Prepared by: Marketing Task Group

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Network Nebraska Marketing Plan 2009-10

Table of Contents

1) Introduction	3
2) Executive Summary.....	3
a) Potential Users.....	5
b) Conclusions	5
3) Marketing Strategy	6
a) Positioning Statement	6
b) Brand Promise.....	6
c) Brand Drivers	6
d) Defined Target Audience	6
e) Defining and pricing of Services.....	6
4) Action Plans.....	7
a) Market Research Action Plan.....	7
b) Current Members Public Relations Action Plan	7
c) New Members Public Relations Action Plan	8
5) Recommendations	8

Education Council

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Introduction

Network Nebraska is the term used to describe the statewide multipurpose telecommunications backbone and all of its associated service offerings and support. Network Nebraska—Education, serving public and private K-12 and higher education, offers network management, interregional transport, Internet access and Intranet routing for distance education, and provides access to the nationwide Internet 2 research and education network. Network Nebraska—Education is a collaborative initiative coordinated by the State Office of the CIO, University of Nebraska, and Nebraska Educational Telecommunications, and is funded by the public and private education entities of Nebraska.

A marketing survey, conducted via Internet among current and potential K-12 and higher education public and private users in December 2008, was designed to provide quantifiable baseline data to guide the Education Council's communications and marketing strategies by providing data on the following:

- General information on strengths and weaknesses on Network Nebraska services.
- Specific perceptions about Network Nebraska services by current and potential users.
- Motivational drivers in choosing Network Nebraska services.
- Current awareness level and perceptions toward Network Nebraska.
- Differences in perceptions between current users and potential users of Network Nebraska.

Executive Summary and Conclusions

The survey results indicate that users of Network Nebraska value the network services and cost savings and that there are potential opportunities to add new partnerships. As K-12 and higher education institutions have become more reliant on Network Nebraska as the vehicle for delivering internet and educational courses, the reliability of the system has become critical. The low level of awareness among potential Network Nebraska partners is a major limiting factor in current network growth. Following are additional key findings:

- Among current partners of Network Nebraska lower cost is identified as the number one strength followed by statewide access and collaboration. This has resulted in increased distance education opportunities, greater availability of Internet 2 and sharing of other services.
- Statewide connectivity provided by Network Nebraska, increases the access to synchronous video courses across the state. This results in more access to classes and enrichment that smaller schools are not able to offer. It also allows for sharing of critical and non-critical services common among multiple institutions.

- Survey responders identified governance/leadership as the most limiting organizational factor in growing Network Nebraska partnerships, and it affects expansion of current services.
- Consistent communications of accurate and current information on available services and support issues (provided by Network Nebraska) is lacking. This results in some support issues not resolved in a timely manner and the lack of correct information not being provided to current and potential partners.
- Reliability is perceived as a strength by some Network Nebraska partners. However, a lack of reliability is also perceived as both a weakness and a threat to expanded growth of Network Nebraska services for many existing and potential partners. When a network disruption occurs, there is no alternative infrastructure or redundancy to data communications. One issue may be a lack of communications between those who do system upgrades and current partners. When network reliability is less than what partners experienced prior to subscribing to Network Nebraska, the network is perceived to be a problem.
- The single most compelling competitive advantage that makes Network Nebraska's services distinctive and motivates Educational Service Units, public and private K -12 schools and public and private colleges to partner in Network Nebraska is lower cost followed by shared resources, and statewide access. A statewide presence encourages connectivity, programs, services, and activities. The result is enhanced educational opportunities for students, high speed access between educational sites, and significant cost savings. The perception is that there is strength and power in numbers – the more organizations that belong to Network Nebraska, the more clout the network should have relative to pricing, technology and services. This assumes all organizations are treated equitably.
- Current partners responding to the survey identified shared resources, advanced technology/bandwidth, equity and opportunities as guiding principles or slogans that they believe Network Nebraska's services should stand for in the hearts and minds of its partners.
- Current partners responding to the survey identified help desk/support, faster internet and leadership/governance as priority areas where modifications to existing services or added services are most needed. Issues that need to be addressed under the governance/leadership structure are statewide representation, board members selected from knowledgeable shareholders, and a technical committee to advise the board on all technical issues.
- Some current partners that responded to the survey are recommending that redundancy be built into the network to insure minimal down time of the system. This expectation will become critical to the future of the network as partners use the system as a vehicle for delivering essential services and courses.

- Current users of the network want to have a better understanding of the network, infrastructure and more information related to Renovo scheduling, etc. There is a perception that as users learn more about the possibilities of Network Nebraska, the demand for new services will expand.

Potential Users:

- Potential users responding to the survey identified learning opportunities through increased collaboration and sharing of distance education resources as the greatest strengths. This was followed by statewide access which supports greater sharing of resources. Reduced cost is also seen as a potential strength of the network with potential users.
- The perception of potential Network Nebraska users is that high cost is an issue of concern. In part, this may be caused by not having accurate information when considering membership as a network partner.
- Potential users responding to the survey said that lower costs and shared resources should be the most compelling competitive advantage making Network Nebraska's services distinctive and motivating educational entities to become partners with Network Nebraska. This is consistent with responses from current partners to the same survey question.
- Access was defined as the most important service that would benefit potential partners of Network Nebraska.

Conclusions:

The survey highlights several areas of challenge and opportunity for Network Nebraska if it seeks to grow its partners and level of services.

1. The survey indicates that Network Nebraska would benefit from improved communications to current partners and that potential partners lack relevant information about Network Nebraska in order to make an informed decision about becoming members of the network.
2. The perception that the governance structure does not represent the stakeholders and that leadership and support services are inadequate to support future growth is a critical concern. Addressing these three issues is essential prior to implementation of strategies directed at adding new partners and services.
3. Building a marketing campaign to increase awareness among potential partners should center on lower costs, shared resources, statewide access, and increased educational opportunities. Marketing campaigns need to be customized for individual target audiences.
4. The prevailing perception is that the network continues to mature. Partners continue to expect additional advanced services and reliability. Further research is required to define what services should be offered and the willingness of partners to pay for these services.

Marketing Strategy:

A key strategic goal is to create statewide awareness of Network Nebraska-Education as a reliable and cost effective multipurpose telecommunications network for public and private K-12 and higher education.

Positioning Statement:

Network Nebraska-Education is a statewide public and private K-12 and higher education telecommunications network. Funded by the public and private educational entities of Nebraska, it provides reliable, cost effective Internet access, Intranet routing for distance education, institutional data sharing, and access to the nationwide Internet 2 research and education network.

Network Nebraska-Education also provides statewide connectivity, technical experience and support, greater bandwidth, speed and capacity at a reduced cost resulting in more synchronous video courses made available to K-12 schools across the state.

There is increased sharing of critical and non-critical services common among multiple institutions. Both K-12 and higher education institutions are benefiting from lower costs and increased services.

Brand Promise:

- Statewide access to reliable, low cost telecommunications connectivity and support services

Brand Drivers:

- Lower cost
- Reliable shared services and resources
- Statewide access
- Educational opportunities and collaboration
- Member participation/governance

Defined Target Audience:

- Public K-12 schools
- Private and parochial K-12 schools
- Public higher education institutions
- Private and parochial higher education institutions
- Libraries, zoos, museums and other public entities that have an educational mission

Defining and Pricing of Services:

NITC Education Council Services Task Group needs to identify existing services and associated pricing. A discussion should take place concerning membership fee and required level of service for different types and sizes of organizations that have an educational mission. If it is determined that there should be differentiated pricing for these organizations, prices will need to be determined and approved before a marketing campaign for this target audience can be implemented. Any change in pricing for segmented target audiences should be financially viable and supported by a Network Nebraska business plan.

Market Research Action Plan:

Action Item	Responsible	Begin Date
Annually reissue the market survey (with minimal changes) to evaluate the success of the recommended Action Plan(s) and ensure the future of Network Nebraska values.	Marketing Group	December 1
Conduct in-depth research of existing services to determine levels of satisfaction and issues that need to be addressed, and to help define new services and pricing desired by the members (Include as part of annual market survey).	Marketing Group	December 1
<p>Conduct focus group interviews and/or one-on-one visits with target audience representatives to determine challenges limiting their participation in Network Nebraska.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public K-12 schools • Private and parochial K-12 schools • Public higher education institutions • Private and parochial higher education institutions • Libraries, zoos, museums and other public entities that have an educational mission <p><i>First action item to identify associations or other types of meetings of target audiences as venues for focus group interviews and presentations.</i></p>	Marketing Group	September 15 Move this date up due to Phase IV recruiting

Current Members Public Relations Action Plan:

Action Item	Responsible	Begin Date
[Public Relations effort] Put in place an electronic newsletter to improve communication with existing members. Newsletter should provide accurate and current information on available services, support issues and policies that impact members. This newsletter should include information on new members and be sent to administrators as well as technical staff. E-mail should be sent to invite people to go to the website to read the newsletter.	Staff	September January May

Set up an internet news blog that invites current members and prospective members to provide comments.	Staff	
<p>www.nebraska.gov/education</p> <p>[Electronic Communication – dynamic in nature, always something new to add/ old to remove; anytime/anywhere]</p> <p>Monitor and make recommendations to the ongoing usefulness and reliability of the website for public access to educational resources in Nebraska.</p> <p>a) reach out to schools to update site as needed b)</p>	Ad hoc committee?	Spring Fall

New Members Public Relations Action Plan:

Action Item	Responsible	Begin Date
Review current Network Nebraska website and make recommendations to improve information content and friendliness of the website.	Marketing Group	July 1
Group potential members by like-target audience.	Membership Committee	August/September Education Council Meeting
Establish annual new member goals by target audience.	Membership Committee	
Prepare factsheet for each target audience that includes overview of Network Nebraska, policies, funding, services, pricing, similar current members and contact. *	Marketing Group and (Tom Rolfes)	
Develop electronic campaign marketing materials that can be used in PowerPoint presentations and printed on demand for small group and one-to-one recruiting.	Marketing Group and (Tom Rolfes)	November 1
Establish one-to-one marketing recruiting.	Marketing Group and (Tom Rolfes)	After completion of focus group meetings
Evaluate effectiveness of new member campaign annually.	Membership Committee	

Note: * Input required from CAP and Education Council to complete.

Recommendations:

- Develop Network Nebraska Business Plan
- Appoint a membership committee to recruit new members and work with current members.