

## **Start-up Plans To Move KT Projects Forward**

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“Innovation” is the word on everyone’s lips in the FE/HE education sector; or maybe the second word on everyone’s lips after “cutbacks”. FE colleges and smaller universities have known for some time that cuts are inevitable and their strategic planning typically reflects a need to develop alternative income streams.

Knowledge transfer is a sound and sustainable solution to these pressures to commercialise. But, as anyone from the FE/HE sector can tell you, building commercial, customer-orientated strategies into an institutional culture can be a challenging task. Existing marketing and communications strategies are often simply not up to the task of implementing such a different approach to business. Marketing KT opportunities in FE/HE institutions needs a two-pronged approach. Implementing a strong and strategic internal communication plan is crucial. As is developing a purpose-built external marketing and sales strategy.

KT is about making academic and institutional resources marketable and accessible to business but success hinges on the dedication and willingness of academics. Too often, governors and senior management agree to commit to KT development and then spring it on their academics as a done deal. Suspicion exists amongst educators regarding institutional commercialisation and sometimes there can be a tendency to keep academics outside such planning, for fear of opening a can of worms. With an excellent communication strategy in place from the start, instead of sidelining academics, they can be knowledgeably informed of the advantages of bringing “real time” business and industry projects into their curricula.

Recommendations of a good internal communication strategy may also include forming academic work groups, compiling existing business contacts, developing sample project templates, auditing existing curricular strengths and resources and setting milestones and deadlines. Additionally, it may be useful to appoint a KT liaison amongst academics, who is involved in the KT community and understands the gubbins of KT. In this way, the sales and marketing team has a single contact person and a dedicated academic advocate for their efforts.

Typically, the promotion of KT programmes will be given to the organisation’s existing marketing team to handle. There are some fantastic marketing teams working at FE/HE institutions and any one of these teams could put in the research, learning and sales and market analysis that it takes to understand and implement a KT marketing strategy. However, with existing responsibilities they probably don’t have time.

In this sector, “innovation” often suggests the search for alternate income streams. At its core, however, it means making strategic and innovative changes to the traditional, public sector business ethos and practice. The usual FE/HE marketing procedures may not be appropriate for KT and a slicker, leaner “look and feel” needs to be developed.

At this point, senior management teams have to make a decision. To either attempt to slot KT into already-existing practices and habits, or to approach it in an “innovative” way, making some investment in training, research and skilled professionals. This may mean hiring a dedicated KT or innovation team member on a permanent basis and equipping them with the resources and tools to make an impact. Additionally, it may mean working with a qualified start-up consultant or the more temporary employment of an industry expert.

However it's done, it needs to be informed by professionals (such as many of the IKT members and associates), researched thoroughly and given dedicated commitment and investment. Innovation and commercial income streams are proving to be a promising way forward in this sector. But these projects need to be allowed to move quickly and responsively; to listen to customers and to act on trends. If we shackle KT project management to our other bigger, older, slower practices, we risk losing our edge with the business sector and that simply defeats the purpose. Contact me for an informal chat about KT marketing challenges or sharing best practice.

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