

**E-BUSINESS IN EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY ON COMMUNICATION NETWORK
BETWEEN RANGSIT UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY STUDIES ABROAD
CONSORTIUM (USAC), UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO, USA.**

ASST. PROF. GESSANEE MANEERUTT

INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE RANGSIT UNIVERSITY, PATHUM-THANI, THAILAND

ABSTRACT

The objective of this preliminary study is to confirm that to promote marketing with overseas universities can be conducted online. Electronic communication channel through university website and internet is the common e-business tool where needed information is reachable. Rangsit University International College is one of USAC offshore sites where students from university members in USA can apply to join the exchange program in Thailand. To increase USAC enrollment, efficient communication is significant and IT advancement has been proved to be a low-cost but most effective means to do e-business in Education. Even data of this study are collected online from pervious and current students who join the exchange program including USAC officers. This is a qualitative study and interview is used as the research tool. The study results show that students, home universities in USA, USAC officers, Rangsit coordinators, even parents, mainly and directly communicate online. Since 2002, open-online communication has been the key communication channel consistently. The number of USAC students at Rangsit University has been increasing dramatically from a few to almost a hundred in 2008. Three hundred and thirty-eight USAC students have attended study abroad at Rangsit University during 2004-2008 and have brought an approximate of 86,528,000 millions Baht into the Thai society.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rangsit University was founded in 1985 and its International College (IC) was founded ten years later. Since then, there have been 3 international programs offered; International Business (IB), Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) and Tourism and Hospitality Management (THM). Later on, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was offered in 2003 and Communication Arts in 2004. At present, there are approximately 500 full-program students excluded exchange students.

The University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC) was founded in the same year that Rangsit University was established and USAC is celebrating its 24th anniversary in 2008. USAC is located at the University of Nevada Reno, USA. Through the years, USAC has assisted thousands of American students across the country in studying abroad. USAC firmly believes that living and learning in another culture not only provides the competitive edge today's employers are looking for, but also offers a life-changing experience within one or two terms' abroad. In addition, there are certain advantages students study abroad gain; explore a new culture, take courses not available at home universities and get credits transferred.

USAC has offshore educational sites in more than 25 countries across Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and South America. There are students from more than 600 universities in USA participating USAC programs. There are thousands of students joining study abroad programs of USAC each year.

Rangit University has been collaborated with USAC since 1995. During 1995-2002, the cooperation between Rangsit University and USAC was on such the "rolling boat" situation; not so smoothly as planned. Obstacles that hindered such networking during that time were:

1. Unstable/poor management
2. Inefficient communication network
3. Courses the university offered failed to attract students' interest and most were considered "uninteresting" by USAC students.
4. No permanent contact person to communicate with USAC officers and students
5. Limited manpower to serve students
6. Limited accommodation.
7. Database of exchange students in the university intranet was not existed.

As the reasons, there were only a small number of USAC students attended academic programs at Rangsit University.

2. IMPACT OF E-BUSINESS IN EDUCATION

Realizing that building/enhancing network with foreign countries is limited due to distance and time differences. Moreover, business trip is not an effective means and it does not grant to bring success to organization business. In addition, high travelling cost is another business blockage, especially universities.

For over ten years that free communication engines especially www.hotmail.com and www.yahoo.com have come to be known and recognized among global citizens. Hotmail.com, yahoo.com and more provide free accessibility, free membership, free online communication channel. Such "dot com" opens free channel for citizens of different countries to communicate globally.

As well, Rangsit University, like many, has harvested such global communication network to achieve its internationalization goals. University website and online communication channel were established to promote its educational program nationally and internationally.

Since early 2000, Rangsit University has contacted with USAC officers online to enhance relationship and promote its exchange program. However, online communication Rangsit University has been seriously conducted by permanent contact person since 2003. Bilingual website rsu.ac.th/ic was established together with download application form, permanent contact address on line to provide effective access for information USAC students will need for approval to study abroad. Thus, the year 2003 gave a clear mark of Rangsit University on e-business in education with USAC.

With consistent communication online, the number of exchange students from USAC has been increasing dramatically as shown in the table below.

TABLE 1 USAC STUDENT NUMBER

Year	No of USAC students
1998	Under 5
1999	Under 8
2000	Under 10
2001	Under 12
2002	Under 15
2003	Above 20
2004	56
2005	64
2006	66
2007	72
2008	80

The table above indicates well how e-business in education enhance growing number of exchange students from USAC to Rangsit University in Thailand.

3. IMPACT OF E-BUSINESS IN EDUCATION ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

From TABLE 1 the growing number of USAC students means more monetary injected into the Thai society. Through interview on average amount of expenses a USAC student spent in 4-month term, it is approximately US\$8,000 (260,000 Baht; aprx. 32 Baht/US\$1). Such expenses cover tuition fees, accommodation, food, personal expense, transportation and trips. Therefore, increasing number of USAC means growing economics of Thailand as a whole. Tables below show amount of monetary USAC students have brought into Thailand during 2004-2008.

TABLE 2 TUITION FEES OF RANGSIT UNIVERSITY

Year	USAC student number	Amount of expenses
2004	56	14,336,000
2005	64	16,384,000
2006	66	16,896,000
2007	72	18,432,000
2008	80	20,480,000
Total	338	86,528,000

Remarks: 1 USAC student spends aprx. US\$8,000 in 4-month term. (256,000 Baht/at the exchange rate of 32 Baht/1US\$)

TABLE 3 SEGMENTS OF EXPENSES

Year	Tuition fee	Living expense	Travelling
2004	2,632,000	2,688,000	9,016,000
2005	3,008,000	3,072,000	10,304,000
2006	3,102,000	3,168,000	10,626,000
2007	3,384,000	3,456,000	11,592,000
2008	3,760,000	3,840,000	12,880,000
Total	15,886,000	16,224,000	54,418,000

Remarks: Cost of tuition fees is 47,000 Baht/ student.

Living expense; accommodation, food, daily expenditure, transportation etc, is approximately 48,000Baht in 4 months (12,000Baht/month) Exchange rate is 32Baht/1US\$ aprx.

Figures indicated in TABLE 3 show clearly the distribution of monetary USAC students have injected into Thai society during 2004-2008. An approximate amount of 74.5% of students expense goes for travelling, 14% for living expenses and 13.5% for tuition fees.

4. RESEARCH PROCEEDING

Forty-five previous and current USAC are interviewed on line during Summer 2007 to Summer 2008. All interview questions are open-end and majority are based on students

satisfaction on university performance as a whole. The interview questions are as follows:

1. Satisfaction on university website and online communication
2. Satisfaction on instructors and teaching methodology
3. Satisfaction on academic programs offered currently
4. Satisfaction on advisory system
5. Satisfaction on student activities e.g. field trips
6. Satisfaction on students services and well-being
7. Impact of current social issues e.g. political conflict, economic crisis etc, natural disasters e.g. tsunami, floods etc. on students' decision to come to Thailand
8. Comments for future development

The Interview data is analyzed and concluded in descriptive narration.

5. RESEARCH CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are 4 key components that make USAC attend study abroad at Rangsit University in Thailand which bring a success to the university in terms of academic services and social contribution.

Interview results of this study (prioritized by degree of students' satisfaction) show as follows:

5.1. Effective online communication network

Online communication network is the most effective means that which make communication among USAC officers, students study abroad and Rangsit University coordinators flow effectively. Time and distance are no more constraints in communication across the world. This also includes effective electronic devices used as communication tools must be reliable and at hand of use; a good computer, reliable network, wireless availability, fax, etc.

5.2. Permanent contact

Assigned permanent contact persons play a significant role in making needed information and communication flow reliably and consistently.

It is indicated by USAC students and officers that permanent contact creates reliability and trust in cooperation between USAC and Rangsit University and therefore, more students apply to attend international programs at Rangsit University. In addition, in time of confusion e.g. natural disaster such as the occurrence of Tsunami happened in 2005, political conflict etc., parents can immediately contact with the permanent contact through online, mobile phone, and even fax.

5.3. Unique courses

Majority of USAC students indicated that there are unique courses that International College Rangsit University offers each term. The most recommended courses USAC students' enjoy are:

- 1) Thai for Survival (Thai for Beginners),
- 2) Buddhist Philosophy (taught by Buddhist monk),
- 3) Thai Civilization, Thai Arts (Arts Appreciation), and
- 4) Thai Cooking.

In addition, there are compulsory cultural trips required as parts of study as well. Previous students agreed that these courses are attractive for them to attend study abroad in Thailand and they also recommend them to future students as well.

5.4. Student activities and Services

Majority of USAC students agreed that the hospitality and services they received from the university staff and instructors beginning from arrival in Thailand to departure to USA are what they cannot receive at their home university.

Cultural trips are most recommended and highly meet students' satisfaction. Thus, they would pass on this to the future group.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further study on study abroad to attract more students to come to Thailand should emphasize on;

- 1) Need analysis. Result of need analysis will provide guidelines of what and how to accommodate students' need and therefore, to increase student number as well as increase income into the Thai society.
- 2) Areas of development. Based on the preliminary study, there are certain limitations that Rangsit University need to take action seriously if the university wants to increase USAC student number.
 - 2.1) Academic service needs to be developed and updated.
 - 2.2) Accommodation must be sufficient to locate students' demand.
 - 2.3) English speaking staff is needed to accommodate students' requests.
- 3) New academic programs. Offering more international programs is needed to accommodate more students. Limited program means limited numbers of students.

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