**Online Tutoring for Distance Education Learners K-9**

**By: Natasha Roberts 2436520**

**MDDE 614**

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**Overview Posted Online in Forum:**

One area that I have noticed there to be quite a problem in would be distant learners getting the support they need. It seems an online tutoring company could benefit several countries in North America, Europe and elsewhere. The business idea I have would aim at countries with internet capabilities.

**Overview:**

My business is going to provide a tutoring service for distance education students from grades K-9. The subjects that will be addressed are: Reading, Math, Social, French and Writing. My tutoring center will be unique in that it will offer all services through a Virtual World. In this Virtual World my tutoring services will purchase a “private island”. This would mean that only registered students would be allowed access to this island. According to SecondLife a private Island can be purchased for $234 American. Students will be able to take forms as Avatars and create their own person. Instructors can teach in this virtual world, and help several students at once. Assignments, workshops and practice tests can all be administered through the virtual world. This will allow students who live in remote areas to participate with other students in their own age bracket. It will allow students to communicate to other students and tutors for help. Their progress can be tracked and be rewarded.

**Proposed Products/Services:**

I propose to offer tutoring in the areas of Math, Reading, Writing French and Social Studies. I plan on delivering all services through SecondLife which is a popular Virtual World on our own private island. Students will be monitored on their reading and writing skills. Tutors will administer exercises to determine if a student is improving and what area needs more attention. Parents will receive a “report card” of their child’s progress once a month.

Once a tutor establishes where the student is academically in proportion to their grade (K-9) they will create an individual tutoring plan which will also be sent to parents.

As a Marketing Coordinator at Boston Pizza I am aware of an educational program this company offers in many schools. Once a child reads five books they get a free kids meal. I would like to incorporate this program into my tutoring service with the help of Boston Pizza. It would serve as a nice reward system to students. I would also like to reward students with other incentives.

I would like all tutors to be able to respond to all students within 12 hours. It is important to have tutors online when there are more students in the virtual world.

Tutors will also be able to read assignments for school, and provide feedback to students before they hand them in to their teachers. The tutors will not proof read the assignments, rather help the students understand what is being asked of them, and ensure they are on the right “track”.

There will be Reading, Writing and Math Labs. To help students sharpen their skills. I would like several of the exercises be in a game format. Learning can be fun. Students can receive points to achieve rewards for the academic labs they accomplish successfully.

Student Portfolios will be the job of all students. In their Portfolios they can keep the results of their standardized tests, their personal progress and any pieces of work they would like to add. The College Board states that they recommend distance learners to keep portfolios for admission boards (Frenette, 2003). My services would show students how to successfully start their academic portfolio

For this assignment I have set up this opportunity as a Business Analysis Report because I feel it answers all the appropriate criteria. I have taken several business courses and this layout for this project made sense to me!

There are several common problems that distance educators are faced with regularly. I will discuss three of them and how I believe an online tutoring company can help solve this problem for distance learners. The three problems that I will address are Cost, Audience and Culture. Perhaps the most important problem is Audience, if you don’t understand the audience you are trying to reach – your efforts can be futile. Once you understand the audience you are trying to reach you can establish ways to solve problems in regards to culture and cost. It is very important for Distance Educators to fully understand their audience and what their concerns and needs are. For this pilot project the audience I am trying to reach would be students in grades K-9 who are educated by Distance Providers. It is also very important to understand what helps these students learn, and what their parents feel the needs of their children are.

**Business Opportunity:**

**Overview:**

Throughout my studies one theory that has meant the most to me and has helped me bring everything together was the Theory of Independent Study by Charles Wedemeyer. For Wedemeyer (1981), the essence of distance education is the independence of the student. He also set forth a system of ten characteristics that emphasize the independence and adoption of technology that distance learners must familiarize themselves. According to Wedemeyer (1981) the system should do the following:

1. Be capable of operation anyplace where there are students – or even only one student – whether or not there are teachers at the same place at the same time.
2. Place greater responsibility for learning on the student.
3. Free faculty members from custodial – type duties so that more time can be given to truly educational tasks.
4. Offer students and adults wider choices (more opportunities) in courses, formats, and methodologies.
5. Use as appropriate, all the teaching media and methods that have been proven effective.
6. Mix media and methods so that each subject or unit within a subject is taught in the best way known.
7. Cause the redesign and development of courses to fit into an “articulated media program”
8. Preserve and enhance opportunities for adaptation to individual differences.
9. Evaluate student achievement simply not by raising barriers concerned with the place, rate, method or sequence of student study.
10. Permit students to start, stop and learn at their own pace.

Based on this theory I have decided to offer a program that will aid existing distance learning providers be the best they can be and aid them in achieving success. I feel I can best accomplish this through an online tutoring service that will be available to registered students 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

My business is going to provide a tutoring service for distance education students from grades K-9. The subjects that will be addressed are: Reading, Math, Social, French and Writing. According to the Calgary Board of Education most students struggle in these subjects. By offering these subjects to students I would be addressing the issues of the majority. My tutoring center will be unique in that it will offer all services through a Virtual World. In this Virtual World my tutoring services will purchase a “private island”. This would mean that only registered students would be allowed access to this island. According to SecondLife a private Island can be purchased for $234 American. Students will be able to take forms as Avatars and create their own person. Instructors can teach in this virtual world, and help several students at once. Assignments, workshops and practice tests can all be administered through the virtual world. This will allow students who live in remote areas to participate with other students in their own age bracket. It will allow students to communicate to other students and tutors for help. Their progress can be tracked and be rewarded.

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 These services would be important to this audience because it would help them establish where they are in accordance to provincial averages. According to the Frenette (2003) one of the top concerns of parents of distance educated students is that their children are keeping up to students who remain in the traditional system. A unique service of this company would be student portfolios for students to track their progress. Often within the distance education system once students reach post-secondary levels they require portfolios to display what they have achieved. Parents will also do what they feel is best for their children. This tutoring company will allow parents a way to ensure their children are on track and can meet the requirements of post-secondary schools through student portfolios.

**Market Analysis:**

**Current Market:**

The current Market that I would like to target would be K-9. It is at this stage that students learn the skills needed in reading, writing and math. It is very important for these students to succeed in these subjects earlier on, so they can grasp material in later grades. My current market would also target distance learners or homeschooled students. It would allow them to visit their tutor when they can and when it is convenient to them. With individual tutoring plans students and tutors can decide whenever they’d like to meet online. This would allow tutors and students to communicate in real time via their avatar characters. According to statistics Canada there are 200,000 students who are in distance education programs in grades K-9. In the United States this number grows dramatically to 1.1 million. My business appeal would be to attract the attention of the students – however essentially it is their parents who have the buying power and would actually hire my tutors/business. By offering the parents monthly reports I feel the parents would be able to see how their student is coming along academically. Realistically there is a reason why parents put their into distance education programs. According to Distance Education researchers at HSLDA the top reasons are: living in rural areas, poor school environments, religion and scheduling. Tutoring centers now offer a place to tutors to come to them. My service would be online so students could access their tutoring services just as easily as they could access their course information. My tutoring service would have all the benefits Distance Education has (no bounds of time or place).

**Future Market:**

The distance education sector continues to grow annually. From 2006-2007 statistics Canada saw a 17% increase in students joining distance education. In the future if my business wanted to reach other students; it could market the traditional schooled students. By traditional schooled students I refer to students who go to schools, and sit in classrooms to learn; opposed to their distance learning counter parts. In the first two or three years I would like to focus on Canadian students. After this time I would like to focus on the larger market in the United States. I believe I would like to remain centered on grade K-9. In the future when I decide to try and incorporate American Students I would like to look more into HSLDA. Currently all their information is pretty vague and for students and parents. It is an organization that supports Home Schooling.

**Customer Profile:**

My target customer would be parents who have children who are distant learners. The ultimate goal of most parents is to ensure their child is doing well in school, to secure their futures. My business would attract these parents because I would offer their children a virtual classroom that can be accessed from any computer. I would ensure the parents were part of the tutoring process by allowing them to voice their concerns, and where they feel their child needs the most attention. My tutoring service would be a little more accessible than traditional ones – because it would be offered online. It would also be available for students to make friends with other students. I would need to entice both the parents and the students. If the students are learning by having fun they are more likely to want to achieve their goals. My target customer for the first couple years will be those living in Canada. My future customers would live in the United States. The appeal of my business is that the tutors would be available for tutoring essentially when the student was. When a new student joins we would ensure they have a tutor that is available to meet when the student is. Essentially we would like all tutors to be current teachers or retired teachers. This would ensure that all tutors have the qualifications of teaching. The main draw of my business would be flexible and qualified tutors, student portfolios, monthly parent reports, and a fun interactive learning environment for students.

**Potential Customer Sensitivities:**

One of the main reasons parents feel distance education is more productive for their children is for religious reasons (Wedemeyer, 2007). I think it could possibly be helpful for parents to include when they register their child why they have chosen distance education for their child (if they have). This way I could try and ensure their needs were being looked after within my business. I believe that having the students create their own avatar in SecondLife would encourage diversity. Students would not be judged on material assets in SecondLife. During the first couple years establishing my business as a qualified center would be important. I would want to have qualified tutors (teachers, university students) working within my business. The monthly reports would also put help ease the concerns of parents. They would be able to see the progress of their child.

***Issues Addressed***

***Audience:***

This idea solves the issue of Audience. The Audience is definitely considered and regarded with respect. The audience is not only students but their parents as well. Through the HSLDA it becomes apparent what the concerns of parents are in choosing distance education for their children. This tutoring company helps this audience with these insecurities. It allows parents to see the progress their child is making in comparison to traditionally schooled students to ensure their child is on the right track. In most of North America parents choose to put their children Distance Education programs. Their reasoning can be complex or simple depending on what their values are. It is a choice made by several parents who feel that traditional schooling systems are no longer answering the demands of their needs (Zeman, 2007). Several of these parents are choosing to place their students into programs that are not bound by time or place. It would therefore seem logical for a tutoring company to address these same issues. A company not bound by time or place. This type of tutoring company would address the needs of this audience as well as others. It is important to understand the needs of every specific client, because as individuals everyone would have different needs and values. Tutoring could be based around the lives of the students and parents.

***Culture:***

 It can be argued that Distance Education is a culture of its own. The people who choose distance education over traditional schooling methods have their own set of values and thoughts. According to HSLDA several parents choose Distance Education for the children because they no longer want to be bound by time or place, or because they feel values are missing from traditional schools. This tutoring company eliminates the bounds of time and place and establishes a place for students to learn in a fun educational environment. In North America computers and the internet are becoming more and more popular amongst its youth. It is important to incorporate these new technologies into tutoring and educating today`s youth. This company does this. Every tutor will be able to customize the student lesson plan depending on the needs and values of the students and parents. It would incorporate parents who travel with their children often even students who are very busy with extracurricular activities.

***Technology:***

 It is very important that distance education uses new technologies. It can therefore be assumed that these same technologies should be used in tutoring distance education learners. This new project offers a new idea with existing technology that most children are capable of learning with. It would be important to have a Computer Assisted Instruction program set up to be able to teach tutors, students and parents how to navigate in the SecondLife world. The great thing in North America is that most students have access to the internet. It is becoming more of a norm. Through this project students will also become more at ease with computers, which will help them in their futures. It is important for children growing up in today`s society be comfortable with the technologies that most of society use daily. By using the Internet and SecondLife as a platform for this project I believe we are also considering the Audience and Culture of that Audience. An assumption being made is that most parents and students who are using distance education would have the internet already to be able to use Distance Education Providers. I believe that the desired audience would have the technology already available to them to be able to use this tutoring company. To go beyond this specific audience the tutoring company would have to consider the issues of accessibility. For this current audience I assume the targeting audience would have already solved the issues of accessibility, to be using distance education. Students and parents would be able to take Computer Assisted Instruction programs to learn how to use the necessary technology. The issues of ease and accessibility shouldn`t be a problem.

***Cost:***

 This company would be able to operate on lower costs then most tutoring companies because it will have little to no overhead to pay for. Most tutoring companies have to pay for building leases and supplies. The online platform for this project will reduce the need for all that. Students would be able to learn in the comfort of their own home saving parents the cost of travelling to tutors. In today`s economy cost is an important issue for all families. The main goal would be to show the parents that this company is benefiting their child, while being cost efficient and easily accessible.

***Conclusion:***

I feel as though there is a need for a product such as this tutoring service. It would allow students to be tutored without the binds of time or place which in today’s modern world is very important to several families. Tutors will be able to produce individualized tutoring plans based on student needs. Currently students and parents have the inconvenience of having to travel to their tutor and paying hundreds of dollars per year. Since this tutoring service will run completely online, tutoring prices would not have to reflect traditional tutoring companies. Students learn when they are engaging with the material. This service would allow students to play educational games with their peers. It would be a virtual world where the student could go any time of day and access their reports, their tutoring plans, notes the tutor has left for them, and access their tutor in chat time (through predetermined appointments). I believe this service would be invaluable to parents and students who do not wish to be bound by time or place.

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