

Podcast - Marketing and Advertising to inform learners: Understanding the requirements for RTOs - Transcript

Mel Hartley:

Welcome to TAC Talks, a podcast where we unpack the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015* (the Standards) to provide practical information to support business improvement and compliance practices.

My name is Mel Hartley from the Training Accreditation Council or TAC, and today I'm joined by Russell Docking, one of TAC's auditors. Today Russell will help us navigate the topic of informing learners via marketing and advertising to meet the requirements of the Standards for RTOs.

Before we commence, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are recording on, the Whadjuk people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Hi Russell, thank you for joining us.

Russell Docking:

Hi Mel, thanks for having me.

Mel Hartley:

The first question for today is regarding Standards 4 and 5 of the Standards for RTOs which require an RTO to provide accurate and accessible information about an RTO, its services and performance, and that each prospective and current learner is properly informed. Why is it important for a prospective student to have accurate and complete information about an RTO?

Russell Docking:

Thanks for your question, Mel. To answer this we need to think about why a student accesses information about an RTO.

An RTO's marketing and advertising should enable a prospective student to make an informed decision about which RTO will best meet their learning needs and career objectives.

Much of the time a prospective student has a number of RTOs from which to choose. There are many aspects they might consider, including what course to take, location, access by transport, costs, student facilities, support services, delivery approach and duration, choice of training products and specialisations.

By informing prospective learners about the services your RTO delivers you are making a commitment to them that if they enrol with you, you will provide services that will meet their requirements. This goes both ways, because by enrolling with your RTO you can be confident that they made an informed choice and accept what you have to offer. Accuracy with your marketing and advertising also makes good business sense because after all the time, effort and money you put into it, you can be confident that you will attract learners who are suited to your RTO. Marketing and advertising supports the mutual commitment between you and the student.

Mel Hartley:

In line with the Standards, what information do potential learners need to have?

Russell Docking:

Mel, I would like to approach that question in three parts. Firstly you need to tell them what they could get out of the training your RTO is offering. Then you need to describe what the student will need to put into the training at your RTO. Finally, you need to clearly state what your RTO will do for them.

Let me start with “

What could they get out of the training with your RTO? Firstly, they need to know that they will get accessible and relevant training, leading to the award of a nationally recognised certificate for a unit of competency, a skill set, or a whole qualification. You can't guarantee that they will succeed, but you can assure that you have set up the training to enable them to meet their aspirations.

This certificate may in turn assist in entering a career or gaining employment, or it may lead on to further studies. Again, you can't promise them a job or entry to further studies, but you can explain how the training you offer will improve their chances.

If they want to enter a career where a **licence** is required, the RTO can provide training that will enable the student to apply for a licence. In this case it is very important that the RTO does not suggest that it can award the licence, even if some of its assessors are also assessors for the licensing authority. As an RTO you can only deliver nationally recognised training. Any licensing role you might contribute to is outside your role as an RTO. All decisions about the award of a licence is in the hands of the licensing authority. You need to make sure that fees and costs associated with achieving the certificate are reported separately from those associated with the application for and award of a licence.

Finally, you might also suggest that many learners find that vocational studies can build their self-esteem and help them to re-engage with learning in a welcoming and supportive environment.

So it is important to be clear about what the student will get out of the training at your RTO, and what this may lead to.

Mel Hartley:

If this is what they can get out of the training, what will they need to put in?

Russell Docking:

You will need to tell them what they will need to put into the training at your RTO. It is important to make clear to the learners what your expectations are of them. That includes the amount of time they will need to set aside for the learning – the **amount of training** – including formal contact time (in person or on-line), structured pre-reading and structured follow-up activities. There may also be a requirement that they spend time in a workplace. You should let them know that they can reduce the time by applying for credit or for the recognition of prior learning, and how they can access those opportunities. You may also want to say how much the time can be **extended** if they are struggling to meet the course requirements, and what educational support you can offer. Normally you would indicate that it will take 'this' many hours over a period of 'this' many days, weeks or months.

In addition to time spent on learning, you should also indicate what time they will need to commit to participating in assessment activities. These might be in class, in a workshop, in a simulated workplace or a real workplace.

Secondly, you may want to talk about your expectations of them in terms of commitment and conduct. Rather than spelling it out in detail in your marketing you might refer them to a code of conduct or a statement of student rights and responsibilities.

Then, of course, we come to the subject of money ... how much will or could it cost to complete the course, including fees, costs, and consumables. Here you will need to talk about possible sources of fee support, discounts, refund conditions and consumer rights. Learners should also be informed of costs if they require additional training and/or assessment or re-assessment.

If your RTO also offers assessment services for licensing purposes, you must ensure that the associated costs are clearly separated for learners. This means that learners must be able to easily understand which costs are related to their VET course and which costs are related to their licensing assessment.

Along with money matters, you also need to list equipment, personal protective equipment, uniforms or any other purchases the student will need to make to participate in the course.

Some courses have special requirements, such as police clearances. These also need to be clearly stated and understood by a student before they enrol.

Last, but not least, you need to remind them that the key input they can make is full participation in the learning and assessment activities developed by your RTO to enable them to meet their needs.

Mel Hartley:

We can see what we need to tell them about, what they could get out of the training and what they will need to put in, but what do we need to say about what the RTO will do for them?

Russell Docking:

What will your RTO do for them? That is a big question Mel, and the answer will depend on your RTO, your target market, the industries you support, and the resources you can access. So let's have a go at listing what services you could provide.

Firstly, I think it is important to say that you can and will respond to each student's individual needs. You might indicate that this can be done by varying the way the course is delivered, by offering credit or recognition for prior learning, providing learning support, or by making reasonable adjustments to training and assessment.

Then, let them know that your RTO is accredited to deliver nationally recognised, quality assured, and industry valued training and certification, and recognition by licensing authorities.

As an RTO, you can assure them that you can provide access to appropriate training and assessment facilities and equipment on campus, in the workplace, and/or through work placements or auspiced delivery through third-parties.

You will also manage and provide learning and assessment resources and processes and ensure that they can learn with expert trainers and assessors; and provide a learning environment that recognises the rights of learners to complain or appeal decisions.

And lastly, you need to ensure that the potential learners are informed that:

- About what happens if additional time is required to complete the VET unit or course; and
- if there are licensing requirements then the cost for any additional training and assessment for the licence is clearly documented and available to learners.

It is important that it is very clear what is involved with the VET course and what is involved to meet licensing requirements.

Overall, you can use your marketing and advertising to enable a student to understand the unique qualities of the services you offer as an RTO.

Mel Hartley:

Thank you, Russell, before we wrap up, can you sum up RTO marketing and advertising?

Russell Docking:

Thanks Mel ... **Marketing and advertising should enable a prospective student to make an informed decision about which RTO will best meet their learning needs and career objectives.**

I suggest you look at your RTO marketing and advertising from the perspective of the potential student ... what can I get from this RTO? ... what does this RTO expect of me? ... and what will the RTO do for me?

Be precise about what you offer ... and what you don't offer. For example, your RTO cannot offer a licence, but it can offer an approved pathway to a licence assessment.

When you have drafted your marketing or advertising, review the requirements of Standards 4 and 5 to make sure that you have met every relevant requirement.

Mel Hartley:

Thank you for speaking with us today Russell and working through RTO requirements for marketing and advertising in line with the Standards for RTOs to assist learners in making an informed decision. We hope that this information has assisted your RTO's understanding.

There is quite a bit of additional information on this topic available on the TAC website wa.gov.au/tac including the TAC fact sheets on Marketing and Advertising, Identifying and Meeting Learner Needs, and Amount of Training. In addition to the fact sheets, the podcasts on Protecting Learners when there are Industry licensing Outcomes, Identifying and Meeting Learner Needs, and Amount of Training provide additional information on this topic ... and finally a recording of the webinar on RTO Marketing provides a comprehensive overview of the topic, covering everything from best practices to common pitfalls. It's a great resource for anyone who wants to learn more about RTO marketing and advertising.

You have been listening to TAC Talks with Mel Hartley and Russell Docking, thank you for joining us.