

Welcome to the first issue of Insights for Educators. The topic for this edition is marketing. In the next issue we cover the topic of shorter and more productive meetings. The third issue will focus on strategy.

## What we've learned about marketing of schools – 20 insights from 20 years

1. School marketing is primarily driven by word-of-mouth – five words in fact: “Is your child happy at...?”
2. Word-of-mouth endorsement is driven by perceptions. Perceptions are driven by interactions between students and staff, parents and staff.
3. Your staff is the most critical element of the marketing thrust – as much as prospectuses, advertising and publicity. But they need to be trained in understanding and effectively performing their role as ‘marketers’.
4. To stand out in a crowded market, a school must have a clear point of difference. Remember; “You have to be better; if you can't be better you have to be different because if you can't be different you can only be cheaper”.
5. The whole school community must be able to articulate that point of difference. Ask five staff members why a prospective parent should send their child to your school. You will probably get five different ‘claims’. Ask each person to support their claims and the range of responses will, no doubt, be enormous.
6. Everyone must ‘sing from the same hymn sheet’. Most importantly, the role of the Principal is to put the school into words because those are the words people will use to talk about the school.
7. A school's image derives in large part from perceptions of the Principal's leadership qualities. Enrolment decisions (especially where people are unsure) are often arrived at after meeting the Principal.
8. Marketing 101 says that marketing comprises: Product, Place, Price, Promotion. Too many schools think marketing just comprises promotion – prospectuses, advertising, open days and country visits.
9. The best schools do not have to rely on promotion. Their ‘product’ is exactly what parents in their target market are looking for. Schools with strongest enrolments sell the ‘steak’ not the sizzle.
10. The educational product most parents are looking for comprises four elements: wide range of opportunities (subjects), high educational standards (academic), caring attitude of staff (caring), high expectations of behaviour (discipline) These are surrounded by values, safety nets, accountability and communication.
11. The most effective marketing tool after word of mouth is publicity. Publicity is better than advertising because it has third party endorsement and, therefore, lends credibility to the school.
12. Most school advertising is homogenous and poorly designed anyway. We face 1600 advertising messages per day. Few schools can achieve cut-through in such a cluttered environment.
13. The motivation for most schools' advertising is a fear that if other schools advertise and they do not, they will “miss out”. Parents also want to know, “Why are they advertising and we are not?” Little does it matter that other schools may be wasting resources that would be better allocated to the educational product.
14. On this basis, beware of: advertising supplements, expos and agricultural shows. Communicating in a cluttered forum of similar organisations with similar messages and then hoping to stand out from the crowd, defies logic.
15. Rather than advertising to attract more enquiries, schools should allocate more resources to nurture current enquiries and increase the conversion rate from enquiry to enrolment. After all, these people are interested!
16. In choosing a school, where they have no previous experience, parents need reassurance that they have made, or are making, the right decision. The key to reassurance is communication. Stay in touch with enquirers, involve them, keep them informed of school developments and successes.
17. The decision about which school a child should be enrolled at is not determined solely by demographics. It is more likely to be determined by values, attitude and lifestyle. Hence, parents drive their children the distances they do – it's a case of “I'll buy into that school's philosophy”, not just “I'll buy that schools offering”.
18. Demographic analyses tell you what's happening but give no clue as to what to do. So what if the largest growth area for boys aged 9-12 is Moonee Ponds? What then? State Schools will not let you in, letter box drops are like ‘frog kissing’ (you have to kiss an awful lot to find a prince), cinema ads are a distraction and the bus shelter advertising is ruined when one of your students is sitting there, socks down, snogging and smoking!
19. Where demographics does count is in the country. Income is clearly a critical segmentation variable. Country people feel neglected by the ‘big smoke’. Visits by the Principal show the school is genuinely interested.

20. Marketing activities we have seen that were most effective include: at the end of Term 1 (when parents are still making up their minds about the wisdom of the decision to enrol their child), the Principal had photos taken and sent with personal note from him to all boarders; a booklet 'What we've learned about boys'; the sponsorship of a major regional event apart from AgShow (and at a different time of year); a "Leadership in Residence" program for Boarders; an advertorial (regular column on school events written by Principal) in local newspaper; a brochure – "A decade of development" – highlighting the Foundation's and school's achievements; a major thrust on development of thinking skills for students; the tag line in advertising, 'A Foundation for Success'; a PD Program on role of the staff in marketing the school.

## The Insight Plus 20 Point Marketing Review

On a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Not at all true, 2 = Somewhat true, 3 = Generally true, and 4 = Completely true, how do you rate your school on the following aspects of marketing?

### Planning and marketing processes

1. The whole of the staff at our school is committed to and has a positive attitude towards the marketing of the school.
2. We have a well thought out marketing plan supported by a 12 month action calendar.
3. Marketing processes and activities are well organised and well executed
4. We regularly monitor trends in our catchment area and our community - demographics, moves by our competitors, issues of concern to parents.
5. We have processes for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of our various marketing activities.
6. We have a good understanding of what motivates parents to send their children to our school.
7. The people who have responsibility for marketing have the appropriate skills to do so effectively.
8. We regularly conduct research to measure parents' satisfaction

### Promotional material and activities

9. Compared to other schools in the area we have a strong point of difference which goes beyond just being a private school.
10. Our image and reputation within the community is strong and positive.
11. We have sufficient resources on hand to support our marketing efforts.
12. We employ a wide range of promotional events and activities that help raise awareness of our school and improve its profile in the community.
13. The promotional material we have developed is unquestionably more informative than any other promotional material produced by schools in our area.
14. We are making the best use of technology as part of our marketing efforts.

### "Selling" and enrolment processes

15. Our enrolment process is well designed and ensures the task of enrolling is made as easy as possible for parents.
16. The people at our school with whom prospective parents most talk with have good "selling" skills.

### Communications and relationship development

17. We know how to encourage people to speak positively about us.
18. We have standard procedures in place for handling interactions with parents.
19. We have clearly thought out ways for building relationships within the school, Parish and wider community.
20. If a crisis occurred tomorrow we would know exactly how to handle the situation.

### Now total your score

If you scored 60 to 80 your marketing appears to be in good shape.

If you scored 40 to 59 you are vulnerable - check closely where you did not score well.

If you scored less than develop a list of priorities to attend to.



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