

Marketing Your School's Unique Value

Blackbaud Tip Sheet | by *Chris Sanders*



Marketing is starting to become a high priority for independent, private, and K-12 schools, because it is considered a worthwhile tool for demonstrating a school's value to the public. Not only can marketing promote your school to help you fill classrooms with the most promising students, but it also reminds current students, parents, and alumni why they chose you. Whether you're just getting started or looking to strengthen your marketing plan, these tips can help.

- o **Start close to home.**

It's a simple concept, but it sometimes gets overlooked in the day-to-day processes: keep your community informed, and you're well on your way to great marketing. Reminding everyone about what makes your school unique makes them feel like they're part of something special, and others will notice.

- o **Create a school ambassador program.**

Word-of-mouth advertising is one of the most effective – and inexpensive – forms of marketing. Your students and parents have already bought in to your school. Why not tap in to that valuable resource? Make sure to provide ambassadors with an action plan.

- o **Nail down a strategic marketing plan.**

Make sure that everyone who has marketing responsibilities works with school leaders to develop a long-term strategic marketing plan. From there, you can develop short-term 60-day action plans, detailing goals and tactics for each team or individual.

- o **Develop a clear, meaningful school brand, and use it.**

Branding serves to solidify and bolster your school's identity. Your brand should stem from your core values, or the services and programs you offer that set your school apart from others. All of your advertising, campaigns, and communications should promote and strengthen your brand.

- o **Make sure people can find you.**

Joining your regional independent school association and national associations such as NAIS, TABS, NAPSEC, and AACCS is a great strategy. An even better strategy is to make sure that your school shows up in online search results. An outside professional or knowledgeable employee can conduct search engine optimization (SEO) for your website, but there are certainly things you can do yourself:

- a. Upgrade your listing on Boarding School Review, Private School Review, and other sites that rank highly for the keyword searches people typically use to find schools.
- b. Consider participating in social media. Social sites like Facebook®, Wikipedia®, Twitter®, blogs, and the like generate incoming links to your website and have more weight with search engines.

- o **Don't underestimate the value of a student database.**

Student information software provides a huge opportunity for advancing your school. When your teachers, administrators, and various departments have a central place to store data, student and school information is valued and treated the way it should be. Everyone is able to communicate more effectively, which can dramatically improve your school's image and longevity. What's more, database software can help you track the results of your marketing activities.

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