



District Branding

Sometimes we hear business people saying that school districts should be run more like businesses. In many instances, we point out the differences and why that isn't realistic. For example, we have no control over the product being sent to us (children). It is not like a food processing plant that can sort through all the peas and reject a shipment that isn't up to human consumption standards. Districts, unlike businesses, have a set revenue stream. If we produce a better product (student success), we can't charge more for the product and bring in added revenue. However, there are some areas where we can learn from businesses. With the advent of open enrollment and vouchers, districts need to be effective at marketing what your district offers as districts are now competing with one another for students. Since this is a relatively new concept to school districts, we must learn how to get good at this. To this end, let's look at some marketing information. Following is a blog on the topic. (Retrieved from <https://www.campussuite.com/5-hot-tips-for-marketing-your-school-district/>)

5 Hot Tips for Marketing your School District

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Tips to marketing your school district

“The crisp air and colorful leaves aren't the only hallmarks of fall's arrival. This season's fresh start is also marked by the prevalence of private school open houses. I don't know how it is where you live, but the lawns in my neighborhood are jammed with 'Open House' signs, (outlasting the campaign signs of our esteemed presidential candidates.)

The question is this: why have open houses – and general marketing – become the exclusive domain of private schools? Sure, you might see the occasional public school open house, but not many.

The answer is this: the open house is a marketing tool, and many believe “marketing” doesn't apply to public schools. This can't be further from the truth.

Public schools have been left out of the marketing rush in past decades because most communities had an abundance of parents with school-aged children who saw the inherent value in their district's schools. But times have changed, as this Forbes article explains: many districts are seeing less households with children. This means public schools now have to use marketing to stay relevant and prove their value to the community.

It's time to take the taboo out of marketing for public schools because, in the same way private schools and colleges are competing for students, public schools are, too.

School districts need to embrace marketing principles and make them a component of their broader communications plan. Creating a marketing plan for your school district doesn't take a PR firm or consultant. All you need is the right resources and tools to manage your plan and ensure its effectiveness.

How marketing can help your school district

Brand and image

Marketing helps you develop a clear brand and image that you present to your community. Your district's brand isn't just a logo — it's the outer world's experience with your district, from the Facebook page to the buildings and grounds to the staff. All facets of your district should have a unifying element: that is your brand. Marketing efforts like open houses help polish and solidify your brand, which ultimately helps you connect with stakeholders.

Campaigns

Many districts are familiar with campaigning to raise funds, and marketing strategies apply directly to this technique. Whether you're encouraging your community to vote for a tax levy or trying to raise money for the drama club, marketing principles will improve your existing campaigns and even help you create new ones.

Recruitment

Marketing efforts can be perhaps be most helpful in the realm of recruitment — and not just for students, but for staff and volunteers, too. A school with a forward-thinking, modern image is going to attract better, more invested staff and volunteers.

Student recruitment is clearly an important factor for public school districts. Because state funding depends on an enrollment, the average student brings between \$5,000 and \$8,000 dollars to the school annually. Every student matters and with the increased popularity of open enrollment and school choice, districts have to market themselves to be in the running.

5 tips for marketing your school district

1. Identify your audience

You can't build an effective marketing strategy without knowing your target audience. Collect all the information you can about your district's parents, families, children, and the rest of the community. Create a profile of your audience using not only demographic information but also personal input from the existing families at your school. Continually

refer back to this identified audience profile to ensure that your marketing efforts are properly focused.

2. Organize design assets

Your design assets are the core of your marketing materials. Anything with your logo or letterhead printed on it, such as images, brochures, business cards, newsletters, and videos, should be uniformly colored and designed. If your school needs an overhaul of design materials, it might be worth hiring a marketing professional or graphic designer to advise and implement with your communications team.

3. Conduct a brand survey

In order to understand how to move forward, it's important to understand exactly where you stand right now. Surveys can help you understand your school's position in the marketplace. You can hire a marketing firm to complete the survey on your behalf, or your communications team can put one together using a service like SurveyMonkey. Once you have a grasp on how your school is perceived, especially in comparison to other private and charter schools in the area, you can identify weaknesses and ways to redirect your brand for improved reception in your community.

4. Identify key events

Events throughout your community present an opportunity for outreach. Connect to local businesses, art institutions and civic organizations to tap into a new network of potential families and students. You want to establish a presence in your community and become a recognizable entity. Create a school speaker's bureau to carry your message to the community.

In addition to attending community events, it's important to host them in the form of open houses. At least three times every year, your school should open its doors to the public and bare its soul. Schedule the open houses strategically so they don't interfere with other community events or holidays. Give people an easy opportunity to see what you're all about. These events can rally a lot of school spirit for your existing students, as well.

5. Try new things

Lastly, get outside your comfort zone or status quo. There are a number of outlets for marketing your school. Email marketing with newsletters and a subscriber list is an excellent way to directly reach your audience. Social media, of course, presents a wealth of opportunities for marketing. Post stats about your school, retweet interesting education articles with thoughtful commentary, update followers about school events and new hires. Any story with a personal interest angle is excellent marketing content: profile your principal, a long-time teacher, or even a student or student group.

Use the many marketing channels available to you to celebrate your school community — your audience, both existing families and potential ones, will see that and appreciate

it. And you don't have to limit yourself to digital marketing tactics, either — a good, old-fashioned, paper newsletter can also be effective.

While social media, newsletters, and email are excellent marketing strategies, word-of-mouth is still the most effective marketing possible. Thus, building a stellar community reputation and encouraging existing families to share their experiences is one of the best ways to market your school.

If you have a fairly advanced marketing strategy already, it's time to look into the most effective ways to use your marketing budget. Experiment with Facebook marketing — there are settings that allow you to target specific messages. It's not as intimidating as it might seem, and it can make a major difference in expanding your reach.

It's time for districts to think like marketers

It's time for public school districts to jump on board the marketing train. There is healthy competition within the education field. The responsibility lies with public schools to inform the populous about their viability as a high-quality school for local children.

I put this squarely on the shoulders of the communications director. This can be done with a simple and organized marketing strategy in which you identify your audience, create a cohesive design, conduct a brand survey, host open houses, and constantly improve your marketing efforts to reach a wider audience. Don't let your school lose favor in the school choice movement. You've got it, so flaunt it!"

Dr. Oppor's visits to the townships and civic organizations will be even more critical this year with the Site Analysis and Feasibility Study information. Board members can help by working on scheduling those visits now as it can take several months to make the rounds.

The administrative team is actively planning marketing opportunities and this will surely be a part of the conversation at our upcoming Board/Administrative Retreat. Included here is also another link to a slideshow from Linked In on branding for school districts: <https://www.slideshare.net/dalberico/branding-your-school-district>