Designing a Marketing Plan with a Focus on the Three "R's" - Recruitment, Retention & Referrals
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When creating a marketing plan it’s not about how great your school is, but about your prospective families. Harness the power of social media engagement and excellent content creation to address their anxiety points and show how your school provides the solution. Turn current parents into raving fans who will talk about your school and provide referrals.

INTRODUCTION

Poughkeepsie Day School values curiosity, creativity and collaboration because we want our students to be prepared for the changing landscape of the future. Our students engage in joyful, experiential learning, collaborative projects and problem solving activities – skills that have resulted in our students publishing papers, creating citizen science initiatives, engaging in service projects that have made a difference in our community and gaining acceptances to top colleges. Our alumni have made major contributions in their fields.

PREVIEW

Notice that when I told you about PDS, I mentioned our output instead of focusing on our input – like our fantastic maker labs and our small class size. A key point in marketing is to make sure your message has value for your audience. Parents want to know results. Who will their children become? What will they be able to do?

MAIN IDEAS (Recruitment, Retention, Referrals)

Recruitment – getting families in the door

- **Personas** – paint a picture of the types of families you want to come for a tour. Not just parents, older students are the new client.

- **Understand and address** their anxiety points and their desired results in your marketing. Andy Goodman is a great source for learning how to effectively tell your school’s story in your advertising.

- **Fact finding** -When speaking to prospective families about your school, try to understand what they are looking for, what do they want to know. What do they hope their child will become? Then address these on the tour. Discuss how your inputs: small class size, maker labs and technology create the results that families are looking for.

- **Inbound vs. Outbound Marketing** –inbound marketing focuses on creating quality content that pulls people toward your school’s website. Align your content with your audience’s interests. Inbound marketing involves blogs, social media, e-newsletters, videos and podcasts and search engine
optimization. It is measurable. (Great for targeting people under 40 years of age).

- **Outbound Marketing** – TV, radio, newspapers and Magazines. It requires marketers to go out into the community and to try to create a message that will stand apart from the competition. Difficult to measure. Famous retailer, John Wanamaker, said, “Half of my advertising is wasted, I just don’t know which half.” Can be included in a strategy to plant seeds, confirm and support Inbound marketing – but choose carefully. What is the readership/listenership?

- **Inbound Marketing Strategy – Follow 75 (share school related content), 25 Share community or education related content), 1 (connection a day) rule**
  - **Blogs** – SEO benefits, branding, thought leadership. Link from social media when new posts have been made. Drive people to the blog and your website from e-newsletters. Use search terms in the blog and link from the blog to your website.
  - **Twitter** - @poughkeepsieday, but faculty encouraged to tweet, retweet and interact with other users from their own channels.
  - **Facebook** – Post 2-3x/day when your audience is on the page. Interaction – like a page/group, or get an individual to like our page. Use Insights to discern what types of content get the most engagement.
  - **Flickr** – our account receives over 2 million hits due to tagging
  - **Google+** - Initially focus on being circled in order to extend our reach, than focus on the traffic that is being sent from Google+ to the school website. Use traffic to convert prospective families into visits. SEO benefits.
  - **YouTube** – 2-4 videos month – unedited clips from classrooms, let people see “behind the curtain”, performances, interviews with alumni and parents.
  - **Pinterest** – Reverse the 75/25/1 rule – 75% repin already existing content relating to kids, education, local community. 25% pin school related content that drives people to the website. Engage other Pinterest users by liking/commenting on an existing pin.
  - **Where are the kids?** Instagram, Snapchat. Create a communications club or internship opportunity, 7th grade Insta take-over.

**Converting a tour into an enrollment** –
- The Celebrity Experience: Insider Secrets to Delivering Red Carpet Customer Service (Donna Cutting)
- Targeted communications tailored to the interests of the family/student in several formats – email, postcard, hand written letter from admissions, coach, current parent, teacher

**Parent Referral System**
• **Word of Mouth is Powerful** – Recruit parents who are raving fans of your school to talk about your school in their natural connection points. Provide them with training and tools.

• **Parent Reviews Online** – Parents who have posted about your school on their Facebook page are likely to write a positive review on GreatSchools, etc.

• **Newly enrolled families** – most excited – give them graphics “I got in!” to post to their social media pages with link to your website.

• **Provide email messages they can use** “I just re-enrolled at PDS. Ask me why” with reminders about enrollment contracts.

• **Ask for Referrals** from prospective families during the visit, on the application and from new parents. They are at the stage of the process where they are most willing to give this information.

Retention – **It is easier and more cost effective to retain a family than to recruit new families.**

• Red Carpet Customer Service
• Nurture community with potluck breakfasts, Parent Talent Show, etc. People are less apt to leave a school when they feel a sense of belonging to the community.
• The school should accomplish what it says it will. Reflect back to parents the accomplishments of students and teachers on social media, in newsletters and blogs.