

BECOMING A SCHOOL OF CHOICE MARKETING INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

*Alan Brien M. Ed (UWA)
Chief Executive Officer
Scitech Discovery Centre
City West, Perth Western Australia 6000
Tel: 08 9481 6295 / Fax: 08 9481 6932 / e-mail: alanb@scitech.org.au*

INTRODUCTION

The effects of marketing constantly surround our daily lives, our senses deal with a never ending stream of messages, jingles, pictorial entrapments, price stimulants and the urge to continually think about what you are missing out on. From our televisions, radio, newspapers, junk mail, billboards, e-mails and our teenage children it will never end, the world of marketing has a captive market that it can “attack” and “manipulate” on a daily, even hourly or on a 30 second basis.

The question that we faced in selling our education products can marketing be effective for an Independent school. The CEO of Lever & Kitchen, the detergent people was once reported as saying “.....half of the money we spend on advertising is wasted. But we never know which half.”

This statement could be true for any school that is involved in producing newspaper ads, street signage, colour brochures, billboards or rebranding it's logo and community image.

The success of any Independent school to reach “sustained excellence” and maintain long-term growth is a complex issue involving a large number of interrelated issues. To achieve sustained excellence requires an Independent school to become a SCHOOL OF CHOICE.

A SCHOOL (or any business) OF CHOICE possesses qualities and an operating climate that:

- ❖ ATTRACTS & RETAINS QUALITY STAFF AND SENIOR MANAGERS
- ❖ ATTRACTS & RETAINS QUALITY TEACHING STAFF
- ❖ ATTRACTS PARENTS AS VALUED CUSTOMERS
- ❖ MOTIVATES & EDUCATES QUALITY STUDENTS FOR LIFE

The business of education is about the daily, weekly, yearly and life-long treatment of people.

Your school marketing plan will commence with the way your Board and Principal treat its people (teachers, parents, students, ground staff, cleaners and administrators).

PART A

Contented Cows, Give Better Milk

B. Catlette & R. Hadden (1998) in their book *Contented Cows* identify the direct relationship between employee relations and your bottom line. Their analysis of Corporate America (not including ENRON) and Corporate Australia identifies the comparative performance of those businesses that are “employers of choice”.

In the US, Hewlett Packard, FedEx, WalMart and Southwest Airlines to name a few, are recognised as employers of choice, a detailed analysis of their 10 year business performance indicated:

- the contented cow companies outgrew the common cow companies by a 4:1 margin
- the contented cow companies outearned the common cow by 128% (or US\$40 billion)
- they generated an average 79,000 new jobs per company while the common cows removed an average of 61,000 jobs from their payroll

A similar analysis of Australian companies indicated the performance of Flight Centre, Macquarie Bank and Fosters Group. These contented cow companies outperformed the common cow company in terms of revenue growth and net profit growth.

The research from corporate US and Australia indicates that employers of choice are characterised by the following features:

- ❖ grow faster
- ❖ recruit better employees
- ❖ retain better employees
- ❖ are more productive and profitable
- ❖ generate more jobs
- ❖ create more wealth

Catlette & Hadden argue that productivity comes from people not machines or systems or organisational structures.

“Indeed, the chief reason for our failure in world-class competition is our failure to tap our work force” potential.”

Tom Peter

Research demonstrates that contented cows produce better milk, this is the trademark of Nestle. It’s application to our workers in a school environment could be referred to as:

“A person’s degree of satisfaction with their work situation is entirely and directly related to their output.”

Catlette & Hadden (p7)

In developing and sustaining your Education business, your marketing plan must begin with your employee relations, “do you have contented workers (and pupils) in your school?”

Contented teachers will produce satisfied students and positive parents.

Contented Teachers are Committed

- Hire your teachers that “fit” your school
 - what qualities are you identifying in your people, do they listen, smile, care and say thank-you
- Define your mission in clear and compelling terms
- Show your staff how their jobs fit into the big picture
- Make leadership skills a condition of employment for Heads of Department

Contented Cows are Enabled

- Train to proficiency
- Establish a clear training strategy, linked to the overall business strategy
- Eliminate ineffective, cumbersome systems, policies, rules and procedures that prevent employees from serving students
- Encourage personal initiative
- Allow people the freedom to pursue some things that are important to them
- Be sure everyone has what they need to do their work
- Hire trustworthy people, then trust them

Contented Cows are Cared About

- Attend to individual needs and concerns
- Provide balance between work and life
- Listen (really listen)
- Don’t let anyone abuse your employees
- Provide honest and meaningful performance feedback

Developing a culture of sustained excellence and becoming a school of choice is the first element in the development of your marketing/communications plan.

It must be remembered that the long-term success of your school will depend upon who shows up for work tomorrow, and the attitude they bring with them when they pass through the gate or front door. It's their ideas, emotions, their energy. It is also their expectations of you (the Principal/CEO) and their faith in you.

It's people who individually or collectively, but not always consciously, decide whether to:

- walk with a spring or walk with a shuffle
- smile at students even on a bad day
- show up early and stay late or call in sick
- say "I can help" as opposed to "that's not my job"
- find a way to do it better, faster or settle for "good enough"

Marketing a school starts with the way we treat our people (teachers, parents and students) do we treat them as a life-long asset or a short-term income stream.

PART B

Developing a Communications Plan (What Needs to Get Done)

Communications represents a more embracing concept than marketing. The ability of a school to communicate both internally and externally to current and future stakeholders is critical to long-term sustained excellence.

Creative School Management in Vol. 19, No. 7 March 2002 identified seven factors which are usually required to achieve sustained excellence. They do not list employee relations (outside salary levels) nor the need for an ongoing Communications/Marketing Plan.

The success of any communications/marketing plan is the degree of ownership and commitment of all the staff and stakeholders, it is everyone's duty.

The following areas are critical considerations in formulating your plan:

1. Detailed Analysis of your School
 - a) SWOT Analysis
 - b) Staff Analysis
 - c) Policy Framework and Operational Responsibilities
2. Develop a Research Base
 - a) Historic Trends
 - b) Demographic and Geographical Factors
 - c) Financial Issues
3. Review Performance of Current Communications Strategies
 - a) Define who is responsible and accountable
 - b) How much are we spending (for what result)
 - c) Evaluate the outcomes

4. Define Your (New) Objectives (What Do We Wish To Achieve)
 - a) Objectives
 - b) Target Markets
 - c) Address Real Issues
 - d) Marketing Techniques
 - Public Relations
 - Advertising
 - Promotions
 - On-line Strategies
 - Advertising Agencies
 - e) Editorial Stories
 - f) Branding and Image
 - g) Birth to Death Strategies

References

Catlette, B & Hadden R, 1998, Contented Cows, New York, Sactillo Press
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