

BOLD SCHOOL BRAND

Foreword by Dr Ian PM Lambert

How to leverage brand strategy
to reposition, differentiate, and
market your school

EXCERPT

12 reasons
why school marketing
is different

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12 reasons why school marketing is different

Let's be honest. Marketing and education are often not good friends. In fact, they usually don't play together very well at all.

The educationalists view marketing as a waste of resources that could be better spent on improving educational outcomes. Marketers, on the other hand, are prone to blow a fuse when asked to deliver a steady stream of quality enrolments with resources that are a fraction of their commercial cousins. You — as a leader — end up squarely between a rock and a hard place.

It doesn't have to be this way.

First, let's be clear about the reason for marketing your school. The long-term success (educationally, financially, socially, and spiritually) of a school is dependent solely on a sufficient intake of quality students at an acceptable cost of acquisition. It's the cold hard truth.

So, with our benchmark set, and in preparation for the critical tasks of setting your marketing goals and executing them, let's lift our eyes and survey the education marketing landscape, and why it's different from that of our commercial cousins.

1. Education marketing begins on the inside

In education marketing communication, myriad people from within your school (usually not the marketing people) will interact with parents and community — your customers. All these people need to understand your brand, live your brand, and deliver your brand every day. So the job of education marketing communication is to first market internally; to align the team and to create brand ambassadors.

2. Your school's brand is important

School brands (while not always as well-known outside their target market) are extremely important to education purchase decision-makers (aka parents). It still

remains true that intensely practical criteria drive school selections (think location, price, and performance). The weighting education buyers place on the school brand drives and completes the actual purchase decision. “Can I believe in this school? Can I trust them? Will this school deliver what they promise?”

3. Education products and services are usually complex

Education products are typically complex and sophisticated. Many of the true benefits or shortcomings are not obvious. Education marketing communication needs to take the technical, the subtle, and the intricate, and make it clear, understandable, and persuasive.

4. Education markets have long purchase cycles

The education purchase cycle is a longer process, often lasting from several months to several years or more. Marketing to education purchase decision-makers requires different approaches, depending on what stage of the buying cycle your prospect is in.

5. Your education selling proposition is complex

Your education selling proposition is a sophisticated offer and must present value-based differentiated solutions that support rational buying decisions. You can get attention with gimmicks, but that won't sway the purchasing decision. Complex differences must be articulated, and the messages delivered through well-conceived and compelling communication strategies.

6. There are fewer education buyers

Potential buyers of education products are difficult to identify and expensive to reach. There is only a small market for your school. From the entire population, you must find and engage with prospective parents who have a need for education (they have children of school age), desire what your school offers, are geographically accessible, and financially able. And that's just the first set of filters. If you are a faith-based school, for example, you will require parents to support your beliefs or ethos.

7. Education is an emotional decision

Education marketing communication is not rational, it's emotional – but rational arguments are normally used to support emotional positions. Being a school Old Boy is a very clear emotional connection, but dig a little deeper and you'll find these emotional connections are associated with rational drivers, such as social aspirations and community values.

8. Your prospective parents do their research

The risk of making a bad purchasing decision is high for education buyers. Their answer is research. Forrester Research has shown that over 90 percent of purchasing decisions begin online. But buyers will usually seek the views of opinion leaders in their orbit, while also evaluating references and available statistics. It's also important to understand that they do all this work not just for personal benefit, but because they also need to 'sell' their decision to others within their family – including the student.

9. Education marketers have less research data

If you are Nestlé or Unilever, you don't put a product on the shelf until you've spent millions to know it will be successful. Very few schools enjoy that luxury. Many aspects of your product are prescribed. However, the same restrictions apply to your competition. This makes success a lot more dependent on the experience and savvy of the education marketer.

10. Education deals with more people in the process

There is usually more than one person influencing an education purchasing decision. Often, there are many. Education marketers must identify then reach multiple people across different centres of influence. This will usually mean tailoring messages to resonate with each individual's interests and concerns.

11. Personal contacts make education sales

Education marketing usually doesn't happen through tightly controlled, highly crafted communications like television commercials or other mass media. One-to-one customer relationship building, through personal interaction, demands sophisticated sales management and an educated, knowledgeable, trained enrolments team (read 'sales team') whose words and actions are aligned with school brand objectives. In the end, people make a sale, not strategies, brochures, or websites.

12. Outsiders have a significant influence in education purchase decisions

Education purchasers often look outside their immediate connections to third party influencers for opinions, insight, or referrals. Don't discount the most powerful marketing tool at your disposal – word of mouth. A positive or reassuring word from an opinion leader is worth its weight in gold.

Bold School Brand

So, how does your school's marketing and communication stack up?

Ask yourself some key questions, and be brutally honest when you answer:

1. What specific outcomes do I need from my marketing communications?
2. With our current structure, expertise, and resources, is this realistic?
3. Can I clearly articulate the brand of my school?
4. Can I differentiate my school from the direct competition? If so, how?

About the Authors



Brad Entwistle

Brad Entwistle is the Founding Partner of education marketing firm *imageseven* and Editor of the *School Marketing Journal*. A prolific writer and presenter of marketing content, an insightful strategist and forward thinker, Brad has spent his entire career solving problems for clients. It is these deep insights that have earned him the reputation as the ultimate authority on all things school marketing.

Over thirty years of experience working with schools, in radio production, retail, crisis communications, and consultancy have heightened Brad's uncanny ability to analyse an issue then construct a clear and practical pathway to success. This book is the culmination of ideas that have contributed to the building of a solid brand framework that works.

Brad's lifelong passion for both the strategy and execution of marketing leave little time for anything else, but you might find him studying antique maps or watching basketball with his wife and son.

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Josh Miles

Josh Miles is a brand-obsessed keynote speaker and caffeine addict focused on helping others make their creative obsessions their profession.

As a past TEDx presenter and author, Josh speaks across the US on branding and marketing, including his role hosting the podcasts *Obsessed with Design* and *PSM Show*. Josh is an advisory board member of the Purdue University Lamb School of Communication, and also consults with and is involved in several startups.

Josh previously co-founded branding agency MilesHerndon, and has served as an adjunct faculty member for three university-level graphic design programs. Josh is a past advisor to the Nfluence Network, an international church planting and resourcing organisation for churches spreading the gospel of God's grace, and the Indiana chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

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Andrew Sculthorpe

Andrew Sculthorpe (aka Scully) is the Managing Partner of imageseven, the Australian-based education marketing firm, where he takes the lead in delivering on insight and strategy. His wealth of experience has seen him public speaking around the world, publishing magazines and books, and working as an advertising director, film extra, sports coach, and lead marketing man.

Scully began his career on London's Fleet Street over thirty years ago, and his deep knowledge of content has enabled him to bring corporate level marketing and communications to the education sector. The expertise gained from working closely with clients has made him the ideal combination of marcom practitioner and business advisor, topped off with a twist of English humour.

When he's not podcasting, writing, consulting, or running a busy firm, you'll find Scully with his wife and two sons in Perth, or on a cricket oval somewhere.

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About Bold School Brand

This book outlines how any school can adopt the Bold School Brand framework, position themselves, and build a compelling brand. The framework guides school Heads and marketing teams step-by-step through the process, illuminating potential pitfalls along the way.

School Heads are expected to have vision and be creative thinkers; they are also supposed to know how to bring these plans to life. For generations, CEOs and marketing leaders have struggled to make this happen — and they didn't have an educational program to run or the added layers of complexity created by an intensely involved community. The team that brings you the *School Marketing Journal* and the longstanding *SMC* podcast has the expertise, the experience, and the passion for the job.

In *Bold School Brand* the authors demonstrate how to develop and implement the strategy that will set your school apart. Together with relevant case studies and a simple to follow process, they cut through the corporate jargon to model a practical approach to modern school marketing and communications. Put simply, it's insight applied, and the Bold School Brand framework will allow you to make the maximum positive impact for your school.

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