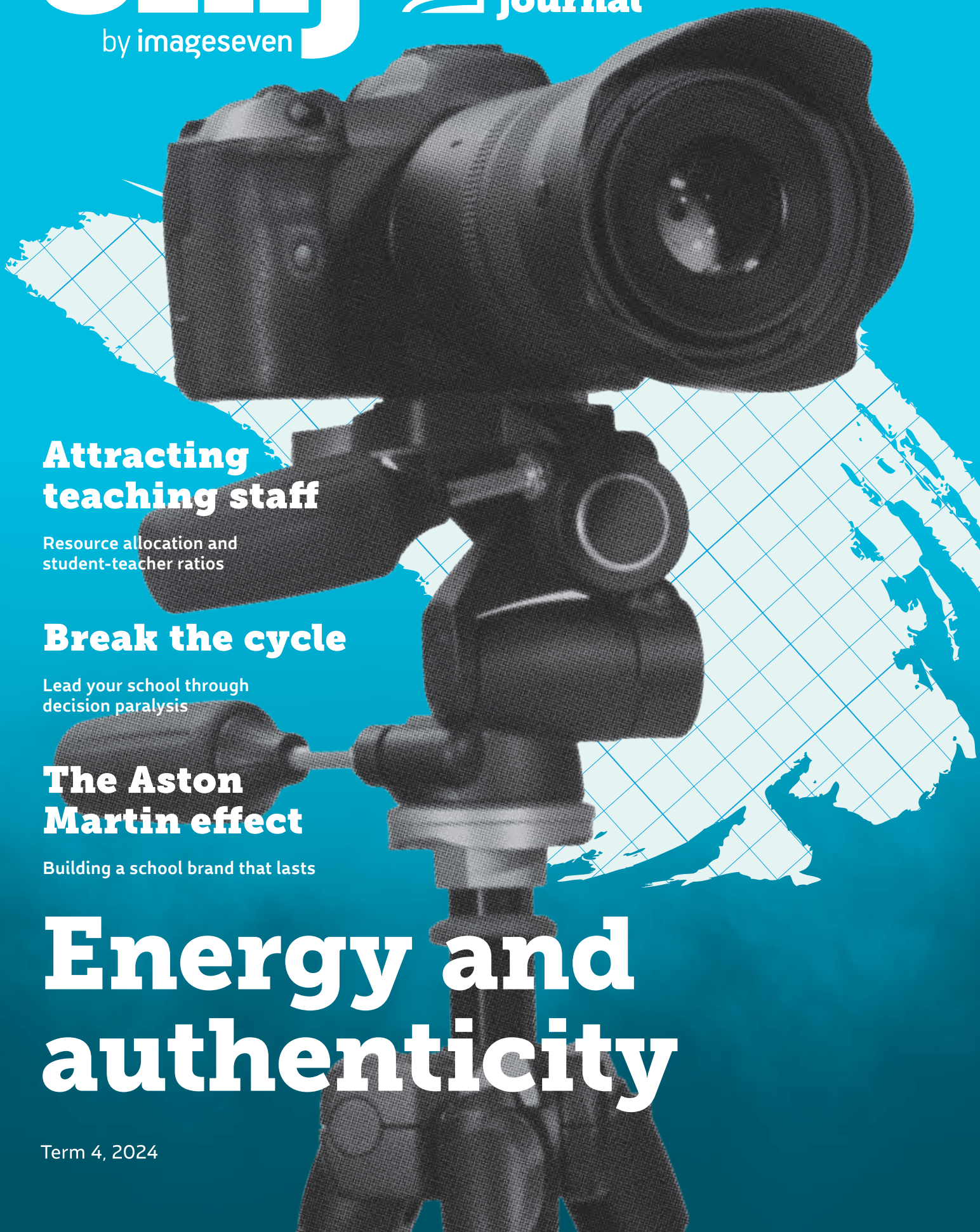
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## Attracting teaching staff

Resource allocation and student-teacher ratios

## Break the cycle

Lead your school through decision paralysis

## The Aston Martin effect

Building a school brand that lasts

# Energy and authenticity

Term 4, 2024

# Data that **talks to you**



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smj school marketing journal

Term 4, 2024

**Editorial mission**
The *School Marketing Journal* (SMJ) helps independent school Heads lead their school brand and augment their own professional development. The Journal provides practical and concise content that makes Heads feel in control and equipped to make better decisions, so they can save time and money, bring their vision to life and enjoy their school's success.

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The views expressed in articles are the authors' and not necessarily those of *School Marketing Journal* or imageseven. Authors may have consulting or business relationships with organisations they discuss in their articles. In the interests of transparency, SMJ will, wherever possible, identify business relationships.

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# From the Editors

**You may have never thought of your school's brand as comparable to that of luxury sports car brand Aston Martin, but in this final edition for 2024 of the *School Marketing Journal* (*SMJ*), we dare you to think like the premium brand that you represent (see page 18).**

While the vision of James Bond speeding through the streets of Europe may not resonate with your specific brand or organisational culture, Aston Martin shows us that long-term loyalty can be generated by creating an emotional resonance with your market.

As the school year draws to a close, it's tempting to take a well-earned breather, but it's essential to remember that this is also the best time to focus on planning for the year ahead. There are a lot of boxes that need to be checked before going into the new year – handbooks, tour dates, advertising spots (book early to avoid disappointment) and more – but when you have a long-term marketing strategy to guide your team, you can be confident that these are done with purpose.

However, when working alongside your marketing and communications team, it's not uncommon to suffer from 'decision paralysis'. Indecision can create a cycle of discussions that won't help to drive your school forward. It's easy to get caught up in over-analysing options or delaying key decisions in search of the 'perfect' strategy. Find out how to break this cycle on page 10.

*SMJ* exists to be a practical aid for some of the busiest people we know, and we love hearing from you. Feel free to email us at **smj@imageseven.com.au** so we can cover the issues you want more insight on in 2025.

It's your mission. It's your brand.
Do it well. ■



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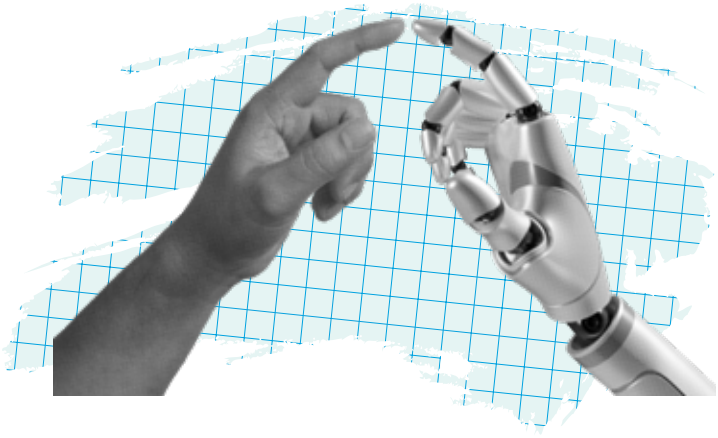


**Nicola Taylor**
Principal
PLC Armidale New South Wales

# Trend watch

## Communicating your school's culture and community

Effectively communicating your school's culture is pivotal in attracting families and creating a vibrant community. A strong school culture fosters a sense of belonging and shared values among students, staff and parents alike. Highlighting this culture in your communications – whether through newsletters, social media or open days – showcases what sets your school apart. Prospective families are drawn to schools where they perceive a supportive and inclusive environment, where students thrive academically and socially. Emphasising community events, student achievements and testimonials reinforces this positive image. Engaging storytelling about school traditions, innovative programs and community partnerships resonates with both current and potential stakeholders. By effectively communicating your school's culture and community spirit, you not only attract new families but also strengthen relationships with existing ones, fostering a cohesive and dynamic educational environment. ■



## Supporting parents in your school community

As an important stakeholder group, building a community of highly engaged parents is essential for thriving schools. In our latest research, we found the key differentiators for highly engaged parents are connection, belonging and quality teaching. Highly engaged parents are 2.1 times more likely to believe that strong partnerships between staff, parents and students lead to positive student outcomes (95 percent versus 46 percent). Their engagement is also significantly influenced by their belief that teachers effectively cater to individual learning styles (91 percent versus 41 percent) and that the school genuinely helps students navigate life's challenges (95 percent versus 47 percent). To thrive, parents need a sense of belonging in the school community, confidence that teachers cater to individual learning styles, strong partnerships between staff, parents and students, assurance that the school supports students in life's challenges and belief that students are prepared to thrive after school. Creating such an environment enhances parent engagement and supports student success. ■



## Preparing for Generation Beta: A new era for education

Next year, in 2025, we will welcome a new generation into the fold, with Generation Beta being born between 2025 and 2039. By 2035, they will make up 16 percent of the global population. As children of younger Millennials (Gen Y) and older Gen Z parents, they are expected to live into the 22nd century. We anticipate Generation Beta will have greater integration with technology, value diversity and will be embracing of change. These traits will shape their development. Preparing for Generation Beta will involve fostering a tech-rich learning environment, promoting inclusivity and equipping students to thrive in a rapidly evolving world. Understanding and embracing Generation Beta's characteristics will help schools create forward-thinking educational experiences, preparing these future leaders for the challenges and opportunities ahead. By doing so, educators can ensure that Generation Beta is ready to navigate and succeed in their dynamic future.

You can find out more about the trends shaping *The Future of Education* in McCrindle's latest *Education Future Research Report*, which is available to access at www.mccrindle.com. ■



**Ashley Fell**

is a social researcher, trends analyst, TEDx speaker and Director of Advisory at the internationally recognised McCrindle. She advises on how to achieve cut-through in message-saturated times, and is an expert in how to communicate across generational barriers.
**mccrindle.com.au**

# Attracting teaching staff

## Characteristics of school staff, resource allocation and student-teacher ratios

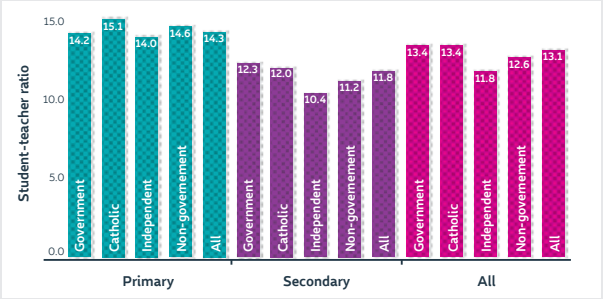
**The last four years have highlighted a significant increase in teacher shortages across the country. The escalating demand for qualified educators, driven by factors such as growing student populations, pandemic-related challenges and an increasing workload, have put immense pressure on the education system.**

In response, is is imperative that job vacancies are marketed not only as opportunities to shape the future but also as positions that offer competitive benefits, professional development and a supportive work environment. By highlighting these advantages, schools can better attract and retain talented educators, addressing shortages while ensuring the continued success of their students.

## Student-teacher ratios

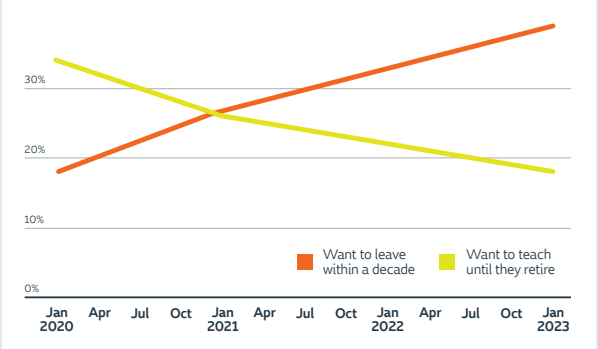
In 2023, the average student-teacher ratio was lower in independent schools (11.8 students per teacher) compared to Catholic and government schools (13.4 students per teacher).

The average student-teacher ratio across all schools was 11.8 students per teacher at the secondary level, compared with 14.3 students per teacher at the primary level.




## Career length

Teachers with less than four years' experience were asked, "How long do you see yourself teaching?" [1]




## Why are teachers leaving?

**"School leadership"**

**"My work does not sustain the level of personal satisfaction I sought from my career"**

**"Administrative load"**

**"I do not feel respected"**

**"Dealing with student behaviour"**

**"The work environment"**

**"Workload"**

**"I could never get on top of classroom behaviour"**

**"The curriculum is crowded, students are pressured to succeed, teachers are trashed in the media"**



# Where are they going?

**90%** of those who had left teaching after 4 to 15 years were still working but in different professions[2].

**36%** are still working in education related areas such as devising education resources, developing education policy, consulting and managing education programs in institutions such as museums and art galleries.



**20%** have transitioned into work in the higher education sector.

**7%** had returned to casual teaching in one way or another.

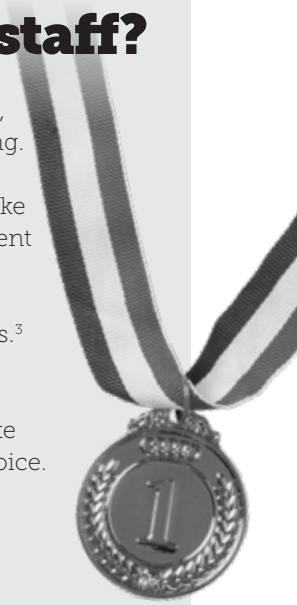
**4%** had sought further education through study.

**4%** had fully retired.



The remaining former teachers were involved in work closely connected to helping people such as in social work, sports coaching, counselling and the wellbeing industry.

# What can schools do to attract and retain teaching staff?



- Highlight and promote their culture, values and location when advertising.
- Maintain a robust LinkedIn profile.
- Emphasise employment offerings like Continuing Professional Development and career progression.
- Create promotional videos to build more robust recruitment campaigns.[3]

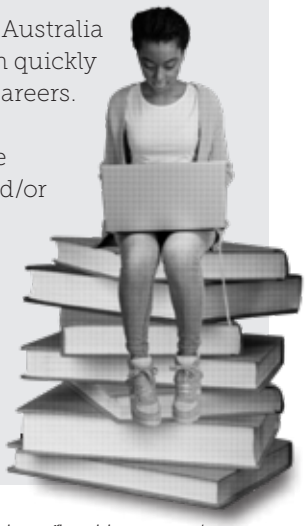
**To counter negative perceptions:**

- Marketing campaigns could promote teaching as a prospective career choice.
- The benefits of the complex but rewarding nature of the profession could be more widely promoted.[4]

# Career prospects

**There are a number of challenges within career progression in the teaching profession.**

- The casualisation of the workforce deters high achievers who seek ongoing employment certainty.
- Career changers want to remain in the area where their families have established strong connections.
- Initial salaries for teachers in Australia start relatively high but flatten quickly when compared with other careers.
- There are limited options for career progression, and these usually involve leadership and/or administrative roles.
- Some perceive teaching as merely repeating the same lessons year after year and therefore lacks the nuance that motivates and provides opportunities for professional growth.



[1] Goloubeva, G., & Uibu, K. (2023). *Public school system facing staffing crisis as more and more teachers say they want out.* ABC News. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-25/public-school-teachers-increasingly-want-to-leave/103142210.

[2] Brandenburg, R., Larsen, E., Sallis, R., & Simpson, A. (2024). Teachers now: Why I left and where I've gone. *Western Teacher,* 53 (2), 18-21.

[3] Bowman, R. (2024). ACARA releases new data on student enrolment and staff retention. *Education Matters Magazine.* https://www.educationmattersmag.com.au/acara-releases-new-data-on-student-enrolment-and-staff-retention/.

[4] Wyatt-Smith, C., Holloway, J., Alexander, C., Harris, L., Day, C., & Marcy, A. (2022). *Reviewing the Evidence Base: Attraction, Pathways and Retention - A Focus on Attracting Candidates.* Association of Independent Schools New South Wales and Australian Catholic University.

# Head on

## How do you address diversity and inclusion in your marketing efforts?



**Maxine Kohler**
Principal
The McDonald College
New South Wales

Being a K–12 school with the specific philosophy of nurturing performers, it is important that our prospective families have a clear vision of their journey through The McDonald College.

Providing an environment where students and staff can thrive and be free to be themselves is at our core. Creating messaging that is authentic and resonates with our ethos of acceptance and diversity is essential but not always easy.

A walk through our campus will clearly show inclusion through student and staff interactions, messaging on walls, photographic displays and students' individual choice of uniform while remaining within prescribed variations. Importantly, we remain open to amending traditions according to societal expectations.

Our marketing team considers carefully the images used both in print, on socials and on our website. We proudly portray our diverse performance offering, academic focus and above all, our willingness to confront the barriers of silence and discomfort that can stifle diversity and inclusion.

Programs and policies that support diversity, equity and inclusion are important but are only the beginning and must not mask slow cultural and organisational change. ■



**Chris Wallace**
Principal
Seton Catholic College
Western Australia

At Seton Catholic College, diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords – they reflect who we are. Genuine inclusion goes beyond photos, videos or posts; it must be lived every day by students, staff and the wider community. When these values are deeply embedded in our culture, they naturally shine through in our messaging.

Our cultural immersion trips offer student experiences that foster empathy and respect for diverse perspectives. These journeys result in authentic stories shared with peers and families, becoming powerful, student-led testimonials about life at Seton.

Our inclusive ethos extends to supporting students with additional needs. We don't highlight abilities or challenges in isolation but emphasise every student's role at the heart of our community, celebrating their contribution as part of 'Team Seton', rather than as participants on the side.

We're committed to inclusive practices, from our uniforms, to celebrating multicultural events and being guided by First Nations Elders, we work hard to ensure all students are valued members of our community. Ultimately, it's our students' lived experiences that form the heart of our marketing. Their stories are more impactful than any curated campaign, reflecting the authenticity that defines Seton. ■



**Loretta Wholley**
Principal
Genazzano FCJ College
Victoria

At Genazzano FCJ College, we may be a girls' school, but diversity and inclusion are fundamental to our marketing strategy, reflecting our commitment to being an authentic, welcoming and contemporary Catholic community.

Our marketing materials and social media presence showcase the richness of our diverse community. We intentionally feature students from a wide range of backgrounds, including our international and boarding students, to reflect the multicultural fabric of our College. We also emphasise our support for students with disabilities and diverse learning needs, demonstrating how we integrate and celebrate their achievements fully into both academic and co-curricular programs.

Accessibility is a cornerstone of our current campus development, and we promote this by highlighting our efforts to make our historic 1889 building wheelchair and ambulant accessible.

In addition to visual diversity, we ensure linguistic inclusion by offering key documents in different languages and providing translators for meetings with non-English-speaking families. This enables all families to engage meaningfully with our community. The way we do things is also part of our brand and we're proud that these initiatives convey a genuine, inclusive environment where every student is celebrated. ■



# Energy and **authenticity**

Dr Briony Scott
Wenona School

**Dr Briony Scott, Principal of Wenona School in North Sydney, spoke with *SMJ* about the School's approach to communicating authentically and candidly, using social media to capture the magic of day-to-day life on campus.**

**SMJ: Can you paint a word picture of Wenona School?**
**BS:** Wenona School is an independent, secular, girls' day and boarding school of nearly 1,400 students in Kindergarten to Year 12 in North Sydney. Wenona is magnificent, very relational and energetic … there is an energy, a kindness and a courtesy about the environment that I just love.

**SMJ: What helped you lead Wenona School into the place it is today?**
**BS:** It was a school that had gone through a lot of change when I arrived; I was the sixth Principal or Acting Principal in five years. There had been a lot of turnover and a lot of upset, but what I learned about schools is that people *want* them to work. So, when the school was struggling and things hadn't gone quite to plan, I made the decision very early on that I would deal with people one heart at a time. It sounds a bit like a Hallmark greeting card, but we determined we had to make sure we are being relational and engaging with people where they are at. Some people were hurt, others felt empowered, and there were those who said, "If you just did this, it would fix it." I think this philosophy has probably been one of the defining undercurrents of our School. A sense of humour is the other one.

**SMJ: How do you view marketing within a school context?**
**BS:** To me, marketing is a much richer word than it implies because it's a way of allowing people to have visibility into what's going on. I think that's magical. However, I feel it starts to distort again is when it becomes glossy and boring – 'here are 10 prospectuses that all look the same' - and you don't actually capture the essence of the school community. I don't think that's marketing. It's crafting a narrative but it's not real. Whereas in my mind, I think of marketing as being an *amplification* of what's happening, not a distortion.







**SMJ: How did organic content feed into your marketing strategy?**
**BS:** At the time, marketing was a relatively recent phenomenon in schools. I would argue that it's really cranked up in the last decade, but prior to that point, it was mostly manufactured. But, about 14 years ago, I realised that these parents [at Wenona] don't get to see the real and funny day-to-day moments. Instead, they saw the formality and the staged 'four girls with a teacher laughing in the playground' images. They didn't get to see what I saw, which might be catching two children playfully trying to get a hat from the gutter where they have inadvertently thrown it or these kind of 'breakout dances' at lunchtime in the big playground which they do a lot. For a parent to see that, they go, 'Okay, my kid is okay. They're having fun. They're safe.'

**SMJ: What prompted the creation of a private Instagram account for Wenona School?**
**BS:** I was really cognisant that parents send their kids to Wenona and we [teaching staff] spend so much time with the children during the school term. And parents really want to know what's going on in their children's lives. They miss things and they would do anything to be able to be there; not all parents can turn up to carnivals or help at the canteen. It's just not possible; parents work and they have other commitments and responsibilities.

So, the private Instagram account for families within our community is more about what is happening during the day-to-day. And of course, as the girls have left Wenona and become alumni, they have stayed on there. It's been a really normal down-to-earth way of keeping in contact.

**SMJ: How do you portray an authentic voice on social media?**
**BS:** It's just me being me. I'm not great at imaginative play or acting like something that I'm not. I'm not naturally a formal person, but the Principalship often forces you into that role, so having this type of content on Instagram has allowed me to be relaxed and have fun with it.

For example, we discovered that when it rains or it's predicted to rain, our students still turn up with no raincoat or umbrella. So, I'll put out a post along the lines of, "Let me introduce you to what an umbrella is … this is an umbrella. This is what it looks like. And this is when you use it." I just take the mickey out of it.

**SMJ: How do you engage with your alumni on Instagram?**
**BS:** Every now and then we'll post something like 'Hooke House won the swimming carnival!' and then alumni from the Class of 2019 for example will comment something like 'Hooke again?!' The content keeps alumni engaged and it has also allowed me to convey messages that aren't strictly formal, but might be reminders about how we behave, how we make community a focus and how we respond to things happening, good and bad. It's a little bit of a subliminal messaging because it's not information that we put in the newsletter, but it's a way of being able to quickly convey things to parents about what's important to us.







**SMJ: What advice would you give to Heads looking to focus on an organic approach to social media?**
**BS:** Firstly, I don't think there is any pressure on Heads to do it if they don't want to. If Heads have other authentic ways of being able to engage with their community, then they should do that. For Wenona, social media met the need. But if they're genuinely wanting to use social media authentically, then they should. I understand why they might be hesitant to take the leap, but if you live in a risk-averse mindset, then you actually don't do anything. And this is not a huge risk because it is all good, positive messaging that is a counterpoint to the messaging that our families are getting all the time about life.

Often, you hear, "Woah, this generation is so bad and this generation have significant issues!" and so forth, but this isn't my lived experience. I've witnessed such an amazing generation of young people who are very proactive and very passionate about global causes and I want to be able to show this.

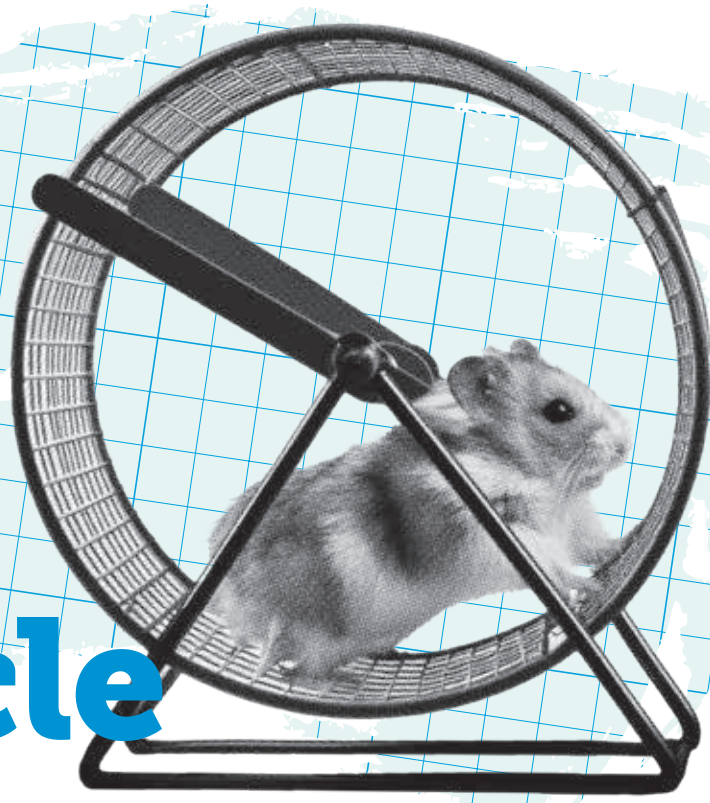
**SMJ: How has social media impacted your legacy at Wenona as you prepare to leave at the end of 2024?**
**BS:** It has helped make visible what has been largely *invisible* to parents. And I think that is a really powerful and very reasonable thing to do. I also think that there are elements of marketing that have become too commercial in the sense that it becomes this glossy promotional thing that has nothing to do with the relationships and the culture of a school.

I look at the marketing over time – I was a Principal for about five years before Wenona at Roseville College in New South Wales – where at one point, schools kept everything largely in-house and it would have been crass to have said aloud what you have done and achieved. It has been interesting watching that transition over the last couple of decades, of going from almost full humility to recognising that it's fun to celebrate and acknowledge what you're doing, and the efforts to get this out to the parents. Especially to those who have made this huge emotional commitment in the School community but who rarely get to see what happens. ■

## profile

**Wenona School**
- North Sydney, New South Wales
- Girls Kindergarten to Year 12
- 1,349 students





# Break the **cycle**

## Lead your school through decision paralysis

**Your world is full of choices. From what we eat to the brands we buy, choosing can feel empowering. But in leading your school marketing, the abundance of choices can be overwhelming for your marketing and communications team.**

Too many choices often lead to chronic indecision – a condition commonly referred to as 'analysis paralysis'. As school Head, this condition becomes particularly acute when decisions directly affect the future of your school. Occasionally, a clear and obvious path might make decisions for your team easy, but your truest true as a leader comes when there are multiple potential paths, none of which seem definitively right ... or wrong.

### The challenge of choice

Complex scenarios that require thorough deliberation should be carefully considered, but prolonged indecision almost always harms progress. Let's explore a few common situations:

- **Implementing new technology:** Imagine a state-of-the-art software tool that promises to streamline your enrolment and reporting processes. The catch? Your team would need extensive training, resulting in a temporary slowdown in daily operations. Do you encourage your team to push through the short-term disruption for long-term efficiency, or maintain the status quo and risk losing enrolments to competitors?

### insight applied

- Set decision deadlines to avoid prolonged indecision.
- Watch for repeated discussions as a sign to act.
- Lean on trusted advisors to guide timely decisions.
- Prioritise action over perfect information.
- Trust your instincts when data is inconclusive.

- **Launching a new program:** Along with your leadership team, you are considering introducing a new academic program aimed at attracting a different type of student. For decades, you've been the school known for well-rounded graduates, but this new program will appeal to parents looking for outstanding academic results and it will mean a significant shift in your brand promise. Your team are looking for cues about when and how to change your messaging. Fearful of wasting resources, they hold and wait for a definitive position. Should you refrain from giving direction until you are sure of the way forward, or should you continue focusing on marketing what is already working?

- **Expanding school facilities:** Your enrolments are growing – congratulations! However, it also means your school is outgrowing its current campus. You are preparing a presentation to the Board about launching a second campus, but should you bring your team into the loop knowing it will divide their attention or do you proceed, knowing it may spread your resources thin?

These are important strategic decisions that you don't want to get wrong, but when decisions like these are constantly re-evaluated, indecision can take root in your marketing and communications team, creating a cycle of discussions and meetings that fail to move the school forward. So, how do you break this cycle?

### Understanding analysis paralysis

When your marketing and communications team are faced with multiple viable options, this is your time as their leader to step in and break the cycle. Great leaders gather all necessary information, weigh their options and take action – even when the decision is not entirely clear. Intuition and experience play critical roles, but how can you tell when it is time to move beyond analysis and make a decision?

# Four signs your communication and marketing team may be suffering from analysis paralysis




**Impact on school culture and morale:** Prolonged indecision can have a detrimental effect on staff morale. When your team sees leadership hesitating, it undermines their confidence in your school's direction. This can lead to disengagement, making it harder to motivate your team toward any future initiatives.




**Repeated deliberations without progress:** If your discussions start to feel repetitive, with no new insights or conclusions, this is a clear sign your team are stuck in a cycle of indecision. At some point, there is no new research or information and continuing to deliberate does little more than drain energy and resources.

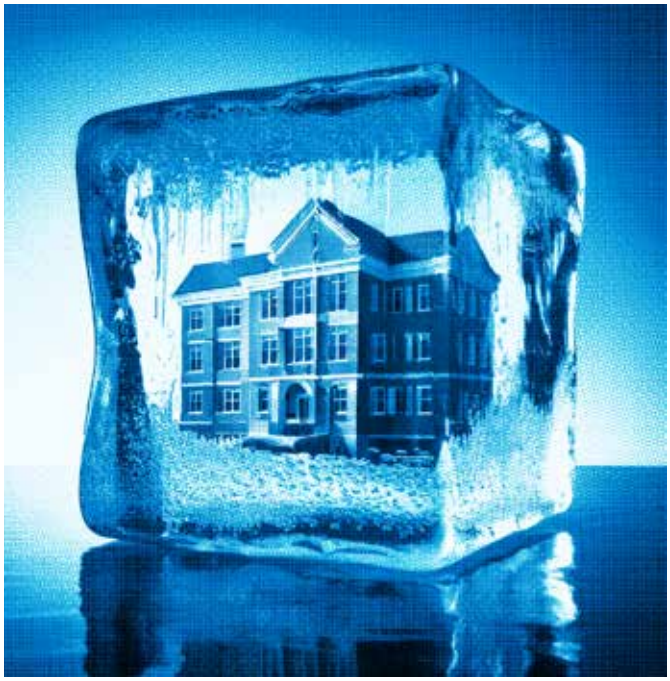



**Growing frustration with opposition:** Debate is healthy and creative tension is a positive, but if you find yourself increasingly frustrated with those offering opposing viewpoints, it might indicate that you have already formed an opinion. This is a sign that you are ready to take action and should no longer seek absolute consensus.




**Fatigue over discussing the same issue:** If you are tired of hearing about the same topic and struggle to maintain enthusiasm for additional meetings, it is likely time to act. Your energy sets the tone for your school's direction, and fatigue can signal decision burnout.

> **... indecision can take root in your marketing and communications team, creating a cycle of discussions and meetings that fail to move the school forward.**



## How to move forward

At some point, you and your team must stop analysing and start acting. This doesn't mean recklessness – it means knowing when enough information has been gathered to proceed with confidence. As a school Head, your leadership is about guiding your school toward its mission, even when the future isn't perfectly clear.

To overcome decision paralysis in your team, try these strategies:

- **Limit the timeframe for decision-making:** Set a deadline for discussions and analysis. While it is important to be thorough, endless deliberation can be just as dangerous as acting too quickly.
- **Engage trusted advisors:** Whether from your leadership team or external consultants, lean on those who can offer perspectives but also help you move towards a decision.
- **Trust your instincts:** As the leader, you have been placed in this role because of your ability to lead decisively. Trust your experience and intuition when the data is not conclusive.

By recognising the signs of analysis paralysis and implementing strategies to overcome it, you can keep your school's marketing and communications team on the path to success. Leadership is not about having all the answers – in school marketing you rarely have complete information – it's about having the courage to make decisions, even when the way forward is uncertain.

Your team is looking to you for direction, and your confidence in making decisions will inspire them to follow your lead. ■



**Brad Entwistle**

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# Crafting a unique **customer journey**

Elevating enrolment experiences for long-term success

**A delirious new dad paces the hospital car park. Through bleary eyes, he submits his firstborn's enrolment application to secure a Year 7 place at the school of their dreams. Your school. What happens next determines if your school remains their dream.**

A month later, the family receives a letter of offer and a beautifully presented enrolment pack. They are elated to have secured a place and excited by the opportunities and experiences that lie ahead.

Fast forward, and up to a decade might pass before they hear from the school again. By then, the family will have re-evaluated their aspirations for their child's education many times and been exposed to a myriad of opinions from countless other parents – and will likely have submitted applications to two alternative schools.

The school of their dreams wasn't so dreamy after all.

This is a surprisingly common experience, yet so simple to avoid.

As a school Head, you understand the importance of creating a sense of belonging for your students. In reality, a family's journey begins long before the student steps foot in the classroom, and it is these early days of engagement that are often overlooked. Crafting a unique customer journey for prospective families not only sets your school apart from your competition and strengthens your brand, but it also presents a transformative opportunity for the enrolment health of your school and sets the tone for the culture of your community.

By refining your school's customer journey, you can create a lasting connection that ensures families don't drift towards other options.

**Impressions that inspire confidence**

The initial interactions a family has with your school can significantly influence their decision-making process. A well-crafted email response, professional telephone manner and warm welcome to a school tour all reflect your school's mission, vision and values and begin to build trust in your brand. On the other hand, a generic response, abrupt answer to a well-meaning question and fragmented and disjointed application process can all plant doubt in the minds of parents that your school can be trusted to deliver on your promises. A shared understanding of your customer's journey provides a clear roadmap to help teams make that all important positive first impression.

**Build memorable moments to outpace competitors**

Staying ahead of your competition has never been more important. A unique customer journey can be a key differentiator. Creating opportunities to genuinely delight families during the enrolment experience demonstrates your school understands each family's wants and needs and demonstrates how your school is the best fit for their child.

## insight applied

- First impressions shape long-term perceptions of your school.
- A unique customer journey differentiates you from competitors.
- Mapping the journey clarifies key stages and touchpoints.
- Personalisation builds deeper family connections and loyalty.

**By refining your school's customer journey, you can create a lasting connection that ensures families don't drift towards other options.**

**Activate word of mouth**

A well-crafted customer journey not only attracts new families who want to find out more about your school, it also keeps families more deeply engaged throughout the enrolment process. This engagement helps build a stronger sense of connection and loyalty to your brand and activates that all-powerful tool in every school's marketing toolkit – word of mouth referrals.

So, you are convinced of the benefits. But where to begin? How do you go about crafting a unique customer journey for your school?

**1. Deep audience insights drive enrolment success**

Start by understanding the needs, preferences and pain points of your prospective families. Where do they live? What do they do and where do they work? Do they have existing knowledge or perceptions of your school? It can be helpful to create personas to represent different segments of your audience. These can be used to inform your communication strategies and ensure your messaging resonates with each group.

**2. Lay the foundation by mapping the journey**

Identify the key stages in your existing customer journey, from awareness building and consideration through to decision points and enrolment.

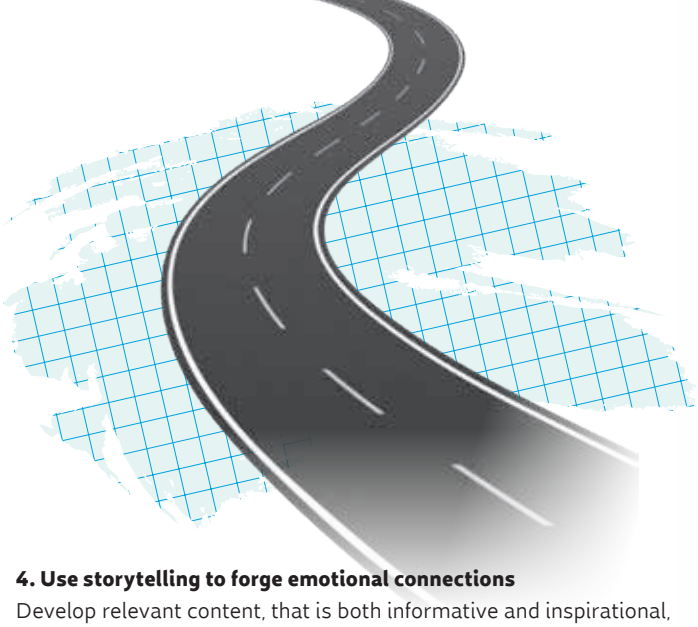
Plot the timeline associated with each of these stages. The enrolment process can span several years from awareness and initial enquiry through to enrolment and it's not uncommon for enrolled families to choose another school at the eleventh hour.

Next, list the various touchpoints where prospective families interact with your school along the journey currently. These could include your website, social media, open days, school tours, your application process, enrolment interviews, offer of place documentation and follow-up communications.

**3. Break the mould: Reimagine the customer experience**

Then, reimagine and reshape the journey to suit your school's context and help you stand out from the crowd. Do not be restricted to the traditional touchpoints – get creative! Why not send your Pre-Primary to Kindergarten families a school readiness kit, including a height chart, colouring pencils and a letter from a Year 6 buddy; or send your Year 7 families a 'countdown to high school' checklist with a welcome video message from their child's House captain.

The number of touchpoints is infinite, so it is important to be clear on the objectives (event attendance, document return, increased enrolment to commencement rate, etc.) for each interaction and measure their effectiveness.



**4. Use storytelling to forge emotional connections**

Develop relevant content, that is both informative and inspirational, tailored to each touchpoint. Use storytelling techniques to articulate your brand story and create an emotional connection. Include a variety of different formats to keep families interested and engaged along the way. For example, consider sending families an introductory video at an early touchpoint to give them an engaging insight into your mission, vision and values and encourage them to register for a school tour. Invite them to attend your community events and keep them connected using termly email updates to celebrate and share highlights and successes that use vibrant imagery and descriptive text.

**5. Use technology to deliver a seamless journey**

Delivering a unique customer journey takes time and resources and can be difficult to execute consistently at scale, no matter how large or dedicated the marketing and enrolments teams. Consider investing in a Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) to track interaction, build automations and manage relationships. If you already use a CRM or enrolment management package, are you maximising its potential and if not, what are the barriers limiting success? If a CRM is not an option for your school, be realistic about what can be consistently delivered well with the resources available to your team.

**6. Personalise the experience**

To further build connection, personalise your communication at each touchpoint wherever possible. Address families by name, reference their specific interests and provide relevant rather than generic information. As you get to the know the interests of your incoming families, invite them to key events that are relevant and engaging. For families interested in the arts, ensure they are invited to the school musical.

Small acts like acknowledging a child's birthday before they have commenced as a student sends an impactful message to the family – you matter to us. Automations are an effective way of integrating personalised communications into the journey without creating an unsustainable administrative burden on your team.

As you map out your unique customer journey, remember, this is not just an enrolment tactic – it's your mission made tangible. Make every interaction count, and ensure families see your school as the only destination that truly fits their child. It is one of the few opportunities available to bring prospective families into your school community earlier – establishing a partnership that leaves little room for the consideration of other schools. Remember, for prospective families the journey is as important as the destination. Make it memorable. ■

## Checklist

### Crafting a unique customer journey

**Know your families**

- ☐ Survey or interview prospective families.
- ☐ Build personas for different segments.

**Map their journey**

- ☐ Identify key touchpoints from enquiry to enrolment.
- ☐ Highlight gaps or weak points in the current process.

**Personalise interactions**

- ☐ Tailor communications to family interests.
- ☐ Use personalised invitations for key events.
- ☐ Acknowledge milestones like birthdays.

**Create memorable moments**

- ☐ Add personal touches i.e., welcome videos or handwritten notes.
- ☐ Surprise families with unique gifts or experiences (i.e., readiness kits).

**Leverage technology**

- ☐ Use a CRM to track and automate interactions.
- ☐ Regularly update and review automations for relevance.

**Use storytelling**

- ☐ Share real stories from students and parents.
- ☐ Mix text, video and images to keep families engaged.

**Maintain engagement post-enrolment**

- ☐ Keep families informed with regular updates.
- ☐ Invite them to participate in school events before term starts.

**Monitor and adjust**

- ☐ Track conversion rates and family feedback.
- ☐ Refine touchpoints based on what works.



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# Crafted stories that connect

## Videos purpose-built for your school's success



Capture the essence of your school with videos that truly connect. We craft stories that elevate your brand and engage the right families. Purpose-built, expert-led, and designed to win your fair share of enrolments. Ready to bring your vision to life?

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image seven
insight applied



# Tear down to transform

## A fresh start for your school's brand

**Renovation is no small feat, and it starts with a deliberate and strategic demolition of what no longer serves you. For school Heads tasked with revitalising an ailing brand, the same principle applies. Before you can rebuild something stronger and more aligned with your school's vision, it is crucial to clear away the outdated elements holding you back. However, like in any renovation, there's an art to demolition, and it must be approached with caution, care and communication.**

As a school Head, you may find yourself leading a similar journey – tearing down parts of your school's identity that no longer reflect who you are or who you want to be, while preserving the core values that still matter. This process requires more than just a bold vision. It demands careful planning, deliberate decision-making and an understanding of how changes will impact the community you serve.

Here are our five key principles to guide you through the strategic process of demolishing and rebuilding your school's brand.

### 1. Deliberate destruction

When you take a sledgehammer to the walls of a building, it is not done in haste, but with precision. The same applies to your school's brand. As the leader, it is easy to see that certain elements are no longer working, but the solution is not always as straightforward as scrapping them entirely. You must first assess what needs to go and what can be revitalised with the right tools.

For example, if your school's marketing strategy seems outdated, rather than abandoning it altogether, evaluate whether it is the messaging, the channels or the execution that is underperforming.

Demolition without discernment can lead to unexpected costs – financially and in terms of community trust. Take the time to understand the underlying issues before making sweeping changes. Seek counsel and ensure you are informed before making decisions that will shape your school's future.

## 2. Preserve what is precious

Not everything needs to be torn down. Just as a renovation crew takes great care to protect elements like hardwood floors or ornate windows, as a Head and leader of marketing, you must identify and safeguard the elements of your school's brand that still hold value. Before initiating major changes, make sure you understand what aspects of your school resonate with your stakeholders.

For instance, does your school have an educational philosophy or a community-driven approach that is valued by current families? Ensure that these strengths are preserved and communicated as you refresh your brand. It is crucial that your current families feel included in the transformation, so that you are not alienating those who have remained loyal and love your school in its current state.

## 3. Communicate clearly and consistently

Communication breakdowns during a renovation can lead to costly mistakes – a detail overlooked or a plan misunderstood can result in a major disruption. The same goes for your brand transformation. Clear, consistent communication is the backbone of a successful rebranding effort.

Before you start swinging the metaphorical hammer, make sure your entire school community – staff, students, parents and even alumni – understands what is happening, why it is happening and how it will benefit them. This is especially important when dealing with changes that may initially seem uncomfortable or unnecessary to some.

Hold regular meetings with your leadership team and staff to ensure everyone is aligned. Create a communication plan that includes key messages to the broader community and do not be afraid to repeat those messages often. Clarity and consistency will help you avoid confusion and unnecessary resistance as you lead your school through this transition.



## insight applied

- Assess before discarding; not everything needs replacing.
- Preserve your school's core values and what resonates with families.
- Communicate changes clearly and frequently to build trust.
- Share a compelling vision to maintain morale and engagement.

> **... if your school's marketing strategy seems outdated, rather than abandoning it altogether, evaluate whether it is the messaging, the channels or the execution that is underperforming.**

## 4. Consider the community

Rebuilding a brand is disruptive and while the dust is settling, your school's operations will continue. It is vital that you consider the impact of this disruption on your school's day-to-day life. As with any renovation, the noise and mess do not just affect the builders – they affect everyone living in the house.

Your community will need to adjust to the changes you are implementing. Some may feel anxious or uncertain about the future, while others may struggle with the sense of loss that comes with leaving behind long-standing traditions or ways of doing things. Provide support, whether through open forums, regular updates or simply creating spaces for them to share their thoughts and concerns.

## 5. Verbalise the vision

In the midst of a major overhaul, it's easy to get bogged down in the chaos of destruction. But as the Head of your school, it's your job to keep everyone focused on the bigger picture – the vision for what is to come. While you may see the end result clearly, others might struggle to look past the temporary discomfort.

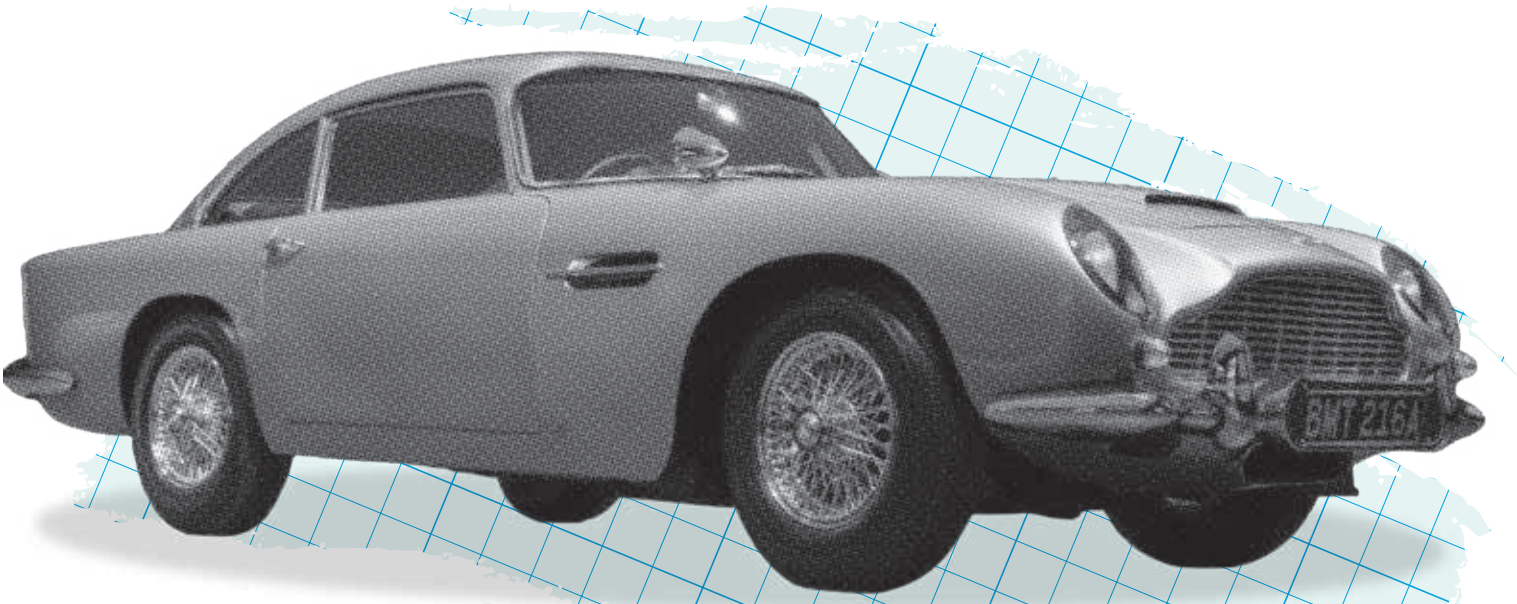
Paint a vivid picture of the future for your community. Help them understand not only what changes are being made, but why. Share the vision of a reinvigorated school brand that better serves your students, aligns with the values of today's families and positions your school as a leader in the competitive educational landscape.

When you keep the vision front and centre, it helps maintain morale during the difficult moments of transition. By preserving what is precious, engaging in deliberate destruction and verbalising the vision, you will guide your school through a transformative process that paves the way for lasting success. ■



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# The **Aston Martin** effect

## Building a school brand that lasts

**Great school brands are not built overnight. They are crafted with care, consistency and a long-term vision that transcends immediate results. But what does it really mean to build a brand that lasts? The answer lies in shifting from short-term tactics to strategic, long-term brand building.**

In 2017, after a lifetime transforming the industry, British advertising legend, Jeremy Bullmore told a story that contains a lesson for every independent school Head and marketing manager:

*Many years ago, the late Len Heath, then in his mid-forties, sold his interest in an advertising agency and took me out to lunch. Afterwards, he offered to drive me back to my office. I protested – my office was no more than 10 minutes' walk away – but Len insisted. And when we got to his car, I understood why. It was a shining, stunning, elegant, arrogant, latest-model Aston Martin. It was the first time I'd been inside an Aston Martin and it didn't disappoint.*

*"You may be interested to know why I bought this car," said Len. "I bought it because I saw an advertisement for it."*

*"Well, fancy that," I said.*

*"But that's not the interesting bit," said Len. "What's interesting is that I saw that advertisement when I was 14.*[1]*"*



This story beautifully illustrates the enduring value of brand marketing. When schools invest in brand marketing, they are not just aiming to fill next year's enrolment; they are building a brand that can endure for generations, much like Aston Martin's. It's a long-term play, designed to resonate with students, families and communities over time. In this article, we explore why independent schools should embrace long-term brand marketing and how it can create sustainable value.

## Brand marketing is an investment, not a cost

School marketing budgets are often under scrutiny, with an understandable emphasis on direct enrolment outcomes. However, as Bullmore's story illustrates, brand marketing operates on a different timescale. It's about shaping perceptions, attitudes and emotional connections that last well beyond a single enrolment cycle.

Just as Aston Martin's ad wasn't focused on price or promotions, school marketing should move beyond the tactical to embrace strategic brand messaging. You are not selling just an education; you are selling a set of values, a vision and a promise that reaches beyond the classroom. It's a mistake to reduce school marketing to mere transactions when you are shaping minds and futures.

Research shows that brand-building campaigns deliver stronger returns over time than short-term campaigns. By consistently communicating your school's core values, mission and strengths, you create a lasting impression. And while it may not lead to an immediate spike in enrolments, the cumulative effect of brand marketing helps to differentiate your school in a crowded market.

## Why schools must think long-term

In the increasingly competitive enrolment environment, many schools are tempted to focus exclusively on short-term enrolment strategies. Promotions, scarcity ('limited places' and deadlines) and even discounts can sometimes deliver quick results, but they don't build the kind of brand equity that secures a school's future. What happens when the promotion ends? The value proposition of the school has not changed.

A school's brand – who you are, what you promise and your ability and willingness to keep that promise – isn't just what is written in its prospectus; it's the collective emotional experience that prospective and current parents, staff and students have with the school, and it develops over time. Long-term brand marketing ensures that when families think about schooling options, your school comes to mind – long before their child is of enrolment age. It's this cumulative, long-term exposure that creates emotional resonance.

## Building future loyalty

Brand marketing helps to cultivate loyalty not only among current students and parents but also among alumni and their extended families. Alumni are often the most loyal advocates for a school, and by continuing to market the school's values and mission, you reinforce their connection. This loyalty can translate into future enrolments from family and friend networks, alumni involvement in fundraising efforts, or even alumni sending their own children to the school in the future.

### insight applied

- Long-term brand marketing plays an outsized role in a school's success.
- Marketplace pressure overemphasises short-term enrolment tactics.
- Brand consistency over a long timeframe is vital.
- Regularly measure brand perception to track long-term success.

Parents, too, are more likely to recommend your school to others when they feel aligned with its brand values. By maintaining a consistent narrative over time, schools create advocates who support them beyond their direct enrolment transactions.

## How to implement long-term brand marketing

To build a sustainable, long-term brand marketing strategy, school Heads should focus on the following elements:

**1. Clarify your brand message**
A strong school brand is built on clear, consistent messaging. Ensure your school's positioning and value proposition are clearly articulated across all communication channels. Consistency is key to long-term brand-building.

**2. Engage storytelling**
Every school has a story, and those stories resonate with prospective families. Sharing success stories from alumni, staff, parents and current students can make your brand more relatable and memorable. These narratives should convey the lasting value your school brings to students' lives, much like the long-lasting appeal of the Aston Martin brand.

**3. Focus on emotional connections**
Parents choose schools for a variety of reasons, but emotional factors – such as a sense of community, shared values and a belief in the school's long-term impact – are crucial. Don't just focus on academic outcomes; ensure that your brand communicates the emotional and holistic benefits of your school.

**4. Invest in brand consistency**
Your visual identity, tone of voice and core messages should remain consistent across all platforms. While your tactical campaigns may change from year to year, your brand values should stay constant and recognisable, as they are the anchor for your long-term strategy.

**5. Measure success over time**
Brand marketing success may be harder to measure in the short term, but it's essential to track brand awareness, perception and alumni engagement over time. Consider periodic surveys to measure how well your brand is resonating with your target audience.

## A long-term strategy for success

Independent schools must move beyond short-term enrolment fixes to invest in long-term brand building. Like Aston Martin, schools can create lasting value by consistently communicating their value proposition. Investing in your brand today will secure your school's future tomorrow. ■

[1] Keller, K.L. and Lehmann, D.R. 2006. *Brands and Branding: Research Findings and Future Priorities*. Marketing Science, 25(6), pp. 740-759.



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Case study



# Marking **Milestones**


FIDELIS IN OMNIBUS
TOOWOOMBA
GRAMMAR SCHOOL
1875 150 YEARS
150

Emblem Grammar 150 Logo

Horizontal Grammar 150 Logo

Vertical Grammar 150 Logo

Grammar 150 Pin

**Birthdays, reunions, weddings – anniversaries of a momentous event can be a powerful symbol of connection within families and communities. It is no different for schools; marking the occasion of your founding can be a great opportunity to refresh relationships with alumni, past parents and the current school community, share in your school's evolution and relive beloved traditions.**

In 2025, Toowoomba Grammar School (TGS) will be celebrating a grand milestone – 150 years. The School was established under the authority of *the Grammar School Act 1860 (Qld)*, which allowed for a grammar school to be built in any town where the local community could raise £1,000 – TGS truly was "built by the community, for the community". Given the gravitas of the sesquicentenary, known at TGS as 'Grammar150', a committee for anniversary celebrations was established more than a year out from this milestone year. Knowing there would be a series of events, publications and digital assets required, including promotional items to be produced in 2024, one of the School's first actions was to begin the process of developing an anniversary visual identity.



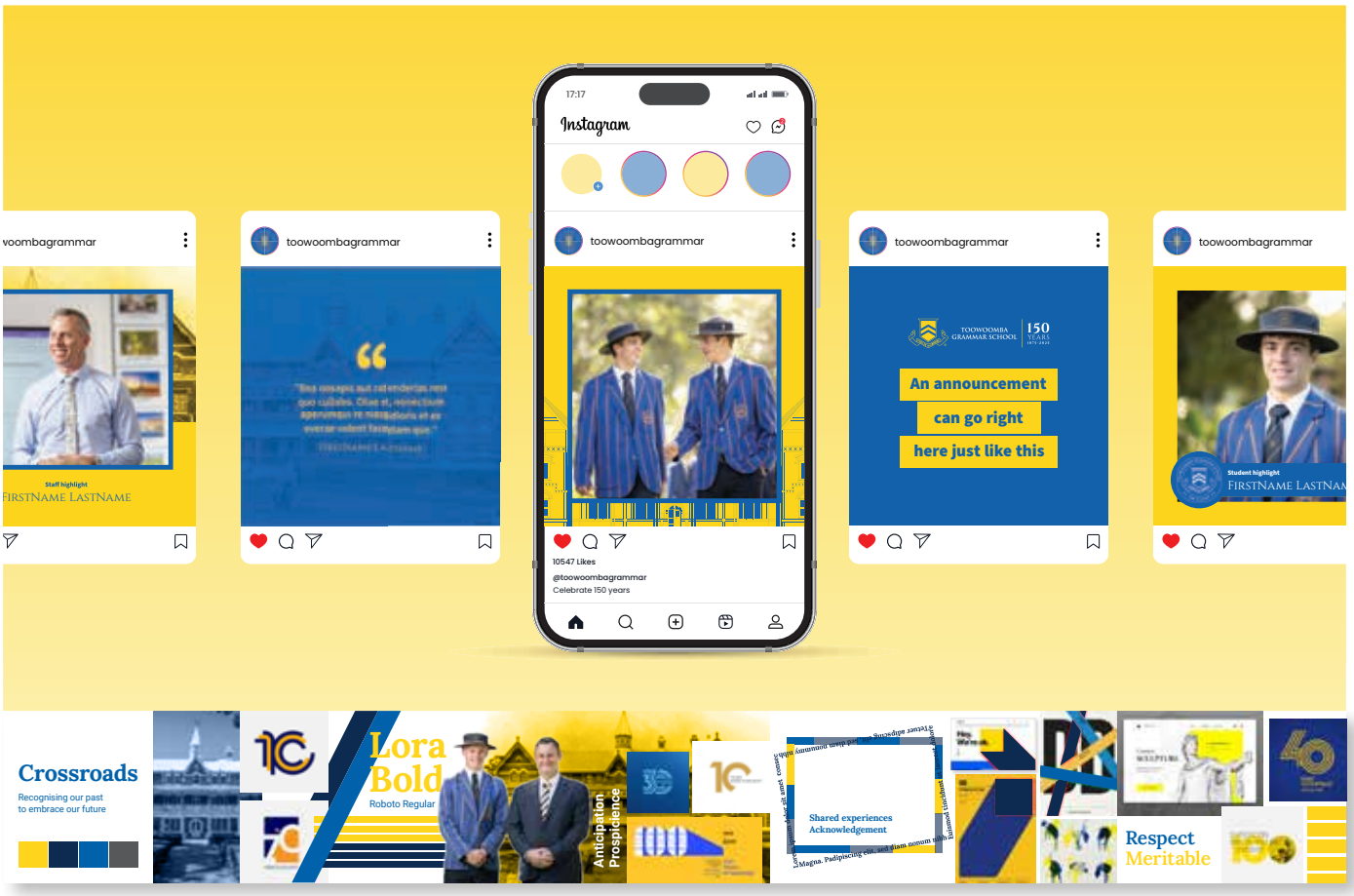

## Why develop an anniversary visual identity?

When planning the scale and tone of the celebration, the Grammar150 committee wanted the look of the anniversary assets to stand out from other School activities such as regular events and campaigns, as well as other major projects such as TGS's Masterplan developments. In addition, the committee wanted to ensure these materials respected the School's heritage, while still embracing the current incarnation of the brand.

Undertaking an Anniversary Visual Identity Program meant going through a comprehensive and thought-provoking process, bringing together the ideas of people with close connections to the School. People who know the community best and would naturally be emotionally driven in their decisions, alongside experts in brand and graphic design who would approach the project systematically. This was about more than an anniversary logo, though that was one key outcome; it was about creating a visual language for anniversary collateral that evoked a sense of belonging, nostalgia, hope, pride and trust in the School.

## Writing a thorough brief

In October 2023, imageseven met with Grammar150 committee members and the School's leaders in a discovery session. This meeting not only addressed the practical deliverables required but also provided an opportunity for the committee to enlighten the imageseven design team on what this anniversary means to the School and greater community. Following the session, imageseven put together a reverse brief for review, distilling the sense of occasion and heritage expressed by the TGS team into key points for consideration and clear instructions on the expectations and requirements going forward.




The brief provided project members with a clear understanding of items such as:

- the collateral, assets and channels where the identity might be used
- mandatory items the identity must have
- other design preferences
- current brand guidelines to consider
- examples of other anniversary logos
- the estimated timeline for each stage of the project
- the approvals and project management processes
- reference material, including the original School logo and other previous brand assets.

## Stylescapes and logo development

A stylescape is similar to a virtual mood board, bringing together images, textures, typography and colours to communicate the visual language of a brand. In the case of TGS's anniversary visual identity, three themed stylescapes were designed to capture different approaches the identity could take: 'Timeless Tribute', 'Campus Chronicles' and 'Crossroads'. In presenting these to the committee, there was a clear favourite from the outset, but the team also liked elements from the other two stylescapes. They took time to review these in detail, come to a consensus and provide feedback to the designers, from which the concept could be refined.

The first and arguably most important deliverable of the project was an anniversary logo. The designers worked on a variety of iterations and versions of the logo aligned with the chosen look. These were then whittled down and refined. It was determined that three versions of the logo would be needed for different placements: horizontal, vertical and emblem, to provide the most flexibility according to needs. By January 2024, the approved logo was ready for use across collateral.

## The rollout

The next phase of the project was to provide TGS with a fully stocked anniversary 'kit' to act as the foundation of all designs. This included letterheads, street banner templates, digital banners, social media tiles and video animations. Secondary elements, such as typography, image treatment and layouts were defined in a Style Guide so that the School's internal designer could easily create assets which aligned with the visual identity.

Despite attempting to foresee all potential uses of the identity at the beginning of the project, some unplanned uses have arisen throughout the process. For example, the preferred version of the logo didn't work as intended when it came to embroidering on a cap and an exception to the Style Guide had to be determined. There will doubtless be other questions on how to use the design elements effectively across anniversary collateral over the coming year, as the series of celebratory events and content marking the milestone is developed, but with the templates and guidelines before them, the TGS team are confident that they have all the tools they need to celebrate such a momentous event in style.

"Our sesquicentenary will be an incredible year for our School, celebrated with a whole calendar of events throughout 2025. We are a community like no other, so it's fitting that the visual look for Grammar150 reflects the uniqueness, the heritage and the journey of Toowoomba Grammar School past, present and future." Dr John Kinniburgh, Headmaster ■

# Accept that everything is emotional

## How to get what you want from a graphic design team

**People behave differently at work than they do at home or with friends. More reserved, more 'professional' – in short, less human. But their emotions are still there, simmering just underneath the surface.**

For creatives, who are doing something that seems a bit mysterious to non-creatives, this is even more true.

> **... emotions are a normal part of the creative process ...**

Acknowledging and accepting that emotions are a normal part of the creative process and the resulting client dynamic will help everyone in any collaboration.

This kind of work requires that we share the inner workings of our brains. Doing it well means we've made an emotional connection with your audience, which we can only do by pouring our emotional selves into the work. Those emotions sometimes overflow, especially – again – if it's not going well. ■




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**8point5.com** Instagram: **Bonnie8point5**



school marketing journal podcast

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# Marketing advice

## Numbers (and the magic of measuring the right thing)

**In just about every group, people decide in advance how they'll show up when it comes to learning, to winning and to responding to opportunities. They're wearing a hat with a label, and over time, it's not hard to recognise.**

This can change based on pedagogy, social conditions and the juxtaposition of status roles, but it's really quite sticky.



A few people are not simply autodidacts, they're actually motivated by the journey itself. They show up early, do the training, focus on prep and learn what they can, merely because they can. This is the person who trains for a marathon and then runs one, without waiting for an organised race to happen.

The second group gets a lot of attention. They are fierce competitors – not only against their personal best, but in regards to the rest of the pack. If others in their investment bank work 10 hours a day, they'll work 10 and a half – but when they move to a new firm, the first thing they'll figure out is what others do.

The 'almost win' group are very much like the winner group, except they almost always come in third or fourth. Resistance is real, and while competition motivates them, fear or other internal limits holds them back. Some people in this group manage to whine and blame the refs or self sabotage … the external symptoms may change, but the outcomes remain.

> **… people decide in advance how they'll show up when it comes to learning, to winning and to responding to opportunities.**

The next group doesn't want to be left behind. They're willing and able to expend effort, but not too much. If they're in a fast group, they'll go faster, but they never see themselves as contenders.

And the last group, with no capital letters, finds satisfaction and solace in doing the least amount possible in this situation.

These hats aren't permanent, and different people wear them in different settings. We may have been handed a hat from an early age, but ultimately, it's a choice.

The only resilient choice, the one that leads to agency, contribution and a cycle of improvement that doesn't depend on the outside word … is the top left quadrant. *You either push yourself or wait for others to push you.* ■





**Seth Godin**

is the author of 21 bestseller books and Founder of the altMBA and The Marketing Seminar online workshops. His blog is one of the most popular in the world and his five TED talks continue to spread far beyond USA borders. Seth was inducted into the Marketing Hall of Fame in 2018.
**sethgodin.com**

# Customer experience

## Teaching students to live an extraordinary ordinary life

**End-of-year commencement ceremonies may still be a little way off, but some of you out there may already be starting to draft your speech.**

And, if past ceremonies are anything to go by, there will likely be references to the many opportunities that lie ahead, how your school has prepared the Class of 2024 to be future leaders of tomorrow, and maybe even an occasional reference to the world being your oyster. Despite our optimistic and triumphant proclamations, however, the experience of many students post-school is sometimes very different.

According to a report by BBC News, data suggests there has been a 28 percent rise over the last five years in students dropping out of university. Similarly, a report released by King's College London cites financial distress and mental health as the primary reasons.

This is not to say, of course, that our schools aren't opening up opportunities each year for our students to go out into the world to live happy, successful and ethical lives. All of us know students whose lives have quite literally been transformed by our endeavours and by teachers who have successfully mentored them towards adulthood. The point is, most of the students that will graduate each year will go on to live very ordinary lives. They will not be leaders, but followers.

"The reality is", to paraphrase a conversation I once had with one of my son's former classmates, "we are the 98 percent. We are the ordinary ones, the often silent majority who don't get the attention. We aren't in the school's Hall of Fame, but our voice is still important."

> **"... as promising a future as they will have in front of them, the reality is that their path will be dictated, to a large extent, by forces over which they will have no control.**

To quote someone who did get into the world's Hall of Fame; Albert Einstein once famously said, "Everything is determined ... by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect, as well as for the star. Human beings, vegetables or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper."

And while we might not wish to make such a fatalistic statement at this year's commencement, it might be worth us considering the story that we will tell our students about life beyond school. Yes, they are the fortunate ones, compared to the world's population of young people. They will have far more opportunities than almost any other generation before them.



And yet, as promising a future as they will have in front of them, the reality is that their path will be dictated, to a large extent, by forces over which they will have no control. Some of them will struggle with their health. Some of them will struggle with relationships or have financial difficulties along the way. And yet, many of them will find love, pursue a career, see their favourite team win, enjoy long evenings with friends and travel to many different parts of the world.

And that, in the end, will mean that they will live an extraordinary *ordinary* life. We just need to teach them that being ordinary really is okay. ■

[1] Bryson, B. (2023). *University dropout rates reach new high, figures suggest.* BBC News. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/education-66940041.

[2] King's College London. (2023). *Student mental health problems have almost tripled, study finds.* King's College London. Available at: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/student-mental-health-problems-have-almost-tripled-study-finds.



**Dr David Willows**

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# Marketing technology

## The new frontier in school marketing

**In the fast-paced world of education, staying ahead of the curve is crucial. Enter artificial intelligence (AI) – the game-changer revolutionising how schools connect with their communities. From crafting compelling narratives to streamlining marketing strategies, AI is reshaping the landscape of school communications.**

### The AI revolution in content creation

Imagine a tool that writes your school's blog posts, generates ideas, conducts research and even proofreads – all at the click of a button. This is the reality of AI-powered content creation. For school marketers juggling multiple responsibilities, AI offers a lifeline, dramatically reducing the time and effort required to produce high-quality content.

### Beyond writing: AI's multifaceted role

The capabilities of AI in school marketing extend far beyond mere writing:

- Idea generation: Struggling with writer's block? AI can analyse trends and conversations to suggest topics that will resonate with your school community.
- Content planning: From creating detailed outlines to organising your editorial calendar, AI helps structure your content strategy for maximum impact.
- SEO optimisation: AI tools can identify and cluster relevant keywords, enhancing your school's online visibility and attracting more prospective families to your website.
- Performance analysis: By analysing engagement metrics, AI provides insights that can shape future content strategies, ensuring your marketing efforts are always data-driven.

### The human touch in a digital world

While AI's capabilities are impressive, it's crucial to remember that it's a tool, not a replacement for human creativity and insight. The most effective school marketing strategies blend AI efficiency with the irreplaceable human elements of empathy, storytelling and genuine connection.

For instance, while AI can draft a compelling blog post about your school's latest science fair, it takes human insight to infuse that post with the excitement and pride felt by students and teachers. It's this combination of AI-powered efficiency and human touch that creates truly resonant content.

### Navigating the AI landscape

For school marketers looking to harness the power of AI, the journey begins with choosing the right tools. Popular options like Grammarly, ChatGPT and Jasper offer varying features suited to different needs. The key is to experiment and find the tools that best complement your existing workflow and marketing goals.



### Ethical considerations and best practices

As with any powerful tool, the use of AI in school marketing comes with responsibilities. Transparency is key – be open with your audience about the role AI plays in your content creation process. Additionally, always review and refine AI-generated content to ensure it aligns with your school's values and messaging.

It's also crucial to maintain a balance. While AI can significantly boost productivity, the unique perspective and emotional intelligence of human marketers remain invaluable, especially in the nuanced world of education.

### Looking ahead

For forward-thinking school marketers, now is the time to embrace AI. By leveraging this technology thoughtfully and creatively, you can elevate your marketing efforts, freeing up time to focus on what truly matters – fostering meaningful connections with students, parents and educators.

In the dynamic world of education, AI is not just a tool; it's a partner in telling your school's unique story. As we stand on the brink of this new frontier, the question isn't whether to use AI in school marketing, but how to use it most effectively to bring your school's vision to life. ■



**Brendan Schneider**

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Podcast: **schneiderb.fm**

# PR and communications

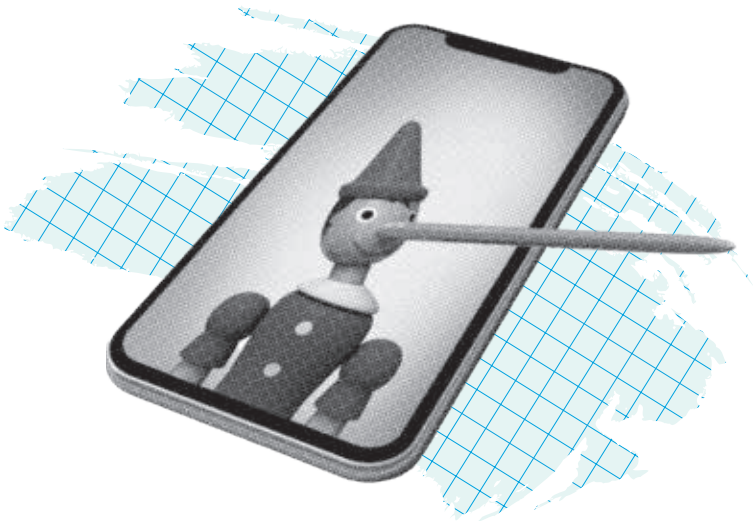
## The million-dollar question: Can you counter ‘fake news’?

**I frequently get asked by clients if it’s possible to stop what we now know as ‘fake news’.**

If you want to define the phrase, it’s really just a new way of describing information published by someone (usually on a social media channel) that is simply made up or grossly misleading.

My answer to the question is very simple: No. Yes, there are options of threatening legal action or complaining to regulators, but, in my experience, in 90 percent of cases this is a waste of time and money.

In the good old days of traditional media, legal action was a legitimate avenue of using the courts to ensure damaging news reports based on false information were corrected or taken down. That was because there was a defined and limited number of publishing news organisations through whom the broader community received its information. If there were only two newspapers in your town, it only required two letters from a lawyer to the editor of each to potentially get a result.



The social and digital media explosion has changed that. There are now millions of ‘publishers’ world-wide (including AI bots) and good luck trying to send a writ or legal demand to them! Likewise, as we have seen, the companies that control these social media giants are highly resistant to demands to counter fake news – even if requested by prime ministers and presidents.

So, the next question is: Can you *counter* fake news. My answer to that is: Yes, you can. However, there is a key principle here that needs to be understood. That is to accept that for any individual, institution or corporate entity, there is a defined (and finite) group of people who ultimately matter. To be blunt: The rest of the world can believe whatever hare-brained idea it chooses to believe about you; it’s what the people that matter most to you think that really matters.



> **... if you only have time to do one thing in a media crisis, make sure it’s reaching out to your key stakeholders.**

While the mainstream news media (despite losing its former power) is still influential, especially in a crisis, focusing on your key stakeholders matters so much more. Whether they are parents of students at a school, customers of a retail business or clients of a financial services group.

To put it another way, while I’m not arguing clients should ever ignore the media, if you only have time to do one thing in a media crisis, make sure it’s reaching out to your key stakeholders. Ultimately, when everyone else has moved on from the issue – which they usually do within a week or two – it’s those whose trust and confidence you need to maintain on a daily basis who are the most important.

As for the keyboard warriors, yes, you need to be across what is being said about you on social media and if necessary, post rebuttals, but this is akin to the legend of King Canute plonking his throne on the beach and trying to hold back the tide. ■



**John Le Cras**

has nearly 40 years’ experience in journalism, public relations, marketing and corporate executive roles. John launched his own consulting firm in 2011 and works extensively in issue management and crisis communication in the private school sector.
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# Marketing mindset

## The secret to a connected alumni network

**When students graduate, their relationship with the school is far from over. In fact, the key to building an engaged and connected alumni network starts long before graduation.**

The most prosperous schools recognise their alumni as a foundation to their long-term success. Your school is the bricks, and your alumni are the mortar: your financial supporters, ambassadors and mentors. Especially those that become trusted advocates guiding prospective families back to the school through word of mouth. So, how do you harness this potential with current students?

### Engage on a personal level

It's never too early to start. A successful alumni engagement strategy relies on forming strong relationships and connections while your students are still on campus. Let's face it, not everyone has a fairytale schooling experience. But if your students feel valued, supported and connected to their peers, teachers and the school, they're more likely to feel nostalgic and stay connected post-graduation.

### Set them up for success

This is particularly important for students nearing graduation. As conversations spark about life beyond school, there is an expectation you will give them the tools they need for the future. This could involve career counselling to guide students towards their aspirations, advising on subject selections and university entry or alternate pathway discussions, connecting students with alumni through mentorships or networking to provide invaluable industry insight or supporting on building real-world skills for their financial, social and emotional health. This proactive approach not only sets students up for success, but fosters a sense of gratitude and loyalty towards the school.

> **The secret to a connected alumni network is simple: engage early, invest consistently and celebrate generously.**

### Celebrate every achievement

Student spotlights are a powerful tool to recognise achievements and foster a sense of pride and belonging. Featured on social media, in the newsletter, school magazine or through the website, spotlights celebrate students' successes to make them feel acknowledged and valued. It also sparks prospective family interests, while keeping the school updated on high achievers, paving the way for continued engagement following graduation.

### Invest in your alumni connections

The school-alumni relationship thrives on mutual support. Invest in your alumni network using online resources, invitations to school and alumni events, access to important information and more. Alumni platforms or Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems designed to facilitate engagement can advance your alumni network to the next level. Embedded within these platforms are tools to help connect the alumni community both to the school and each other. It is important to ensure your students are familiar with these platforms before they graduate in order to capture their data accurately. If your school is not yet at the stage of procuring such a platform, it's still important to ensure that student data is captured and stored before they graduate.



### Summary

The secret to a connected alumni network is simple: engage early, invest consistently and celebrate generously. Leverage the alumni lifecycle and instil values of what it means to be an alumnus. This fosters an authentic connection that triggers an invaluable cycle that benefits current students, alumni and the school combined. The rewards will follow, and your alumni will remain a pivotal part of your school's journey long after they've turned their tassel. ■



**Sophia White**

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# Marketing law

## What can schools do to prepare for stricter privacy measures?

**Following significant data breaches that captured the public's attention (such as the Optus 2022 data breach and the MediSecure health information data breach in 2024), Australia is now poised to introduce sweeping changes to laws and regulations affecting privacy and the protection of data.**

We are now more than four years into the Federal Government's review of the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) (Privacy Act)* and more than 18 months on from the February 2023 *Privacy Act Review Report*. After the Review Report, the Government undertook public consultation to inform the September 2023 *Response to the Privacy Act Review Report*, which included the Government's agreement (or agreement in principle) to many of the recommendations in the Review Report.

> **We recommend schools put privacy high on the agenda for 2025 ...**

While we do not know the final form this 'overhaul' of the Privacy Act will take (as the new legislation after being tabled in Parliament will likely go through much debate before being passed by both Houses), we know that the reform will be based on the Government's Response, and that the Government is committed to enhancing privacy protections for Australians.

In regard to marketing, the Government has agreed in principle to 'defining direct marketing, targeted advertising, targeting and trading (proposal 20.1), noting the critical importance of refining the scope of these definitions ... '



We also expect reform to include privacy protections for children, such as through the development of a Children's Online Privacy Code. There will be increased rights for individuals to have their personal information corrected or erased (like the rights granted to individuals under the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation).

There are significant penalties for data breaches, along with reputational risks. We recommend schools put privacy high on the agenda for 2025 and act now to prepare for privacy reform. This might involve:

- Forming a project team that includes members of your marketing and communications team and IT staff to keep abreast of the reform.
- Appointing a data protection officer, with the capability to work on implementing a privacy by design methodology in your school, which will require privacy to be considered at the outset of all projects and activities.
- Taking stock of what personal information and data the school already holds, and your current processes for storing and protecting that data. Consider why you are holding data and what data may no longer be required (which could be destroyed or de-identified). Also consider your current security measures, and if these are adequate (or likely to be sufficient following the proposed reform).
- Reviewing the contracts you already have in place with any data controllers or data processers, and what rights you may have to require these third parties to adopt stricter security measures if necessary.
- Reviewing your current policies, procedures and practices for the collection and processing of information. In particular, consider what consent has already been granted to the school for the use and collection of personal information it holds and for what purposes data was collected. Make sure all your marketing communications have 'opt out' mechanisms.

While it may frustrate some marketing efforts, implementing a privacy by design approach will be essential for adapting to privacy reform and minimising privacy risks. ■

Note: This article was produced on Friday 6 September 2024.



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# Market research

## Drivers and strategies for quality teaching expectations

**MMG Education's 2024 research continues to highlight that the number one reason for prospective parents to choose a school for their child is quality of teaching.**

This same aspect is the most important with current parents, second only to their child's safety and wellbeing. However, quality teaching is becoming of increasing concern across schools with the challenges of meeting parent and student expectations.

This year's research insights have shown one in five parents and one in four students in secondary schools note their expectations had not been met in regard to quality teaching.

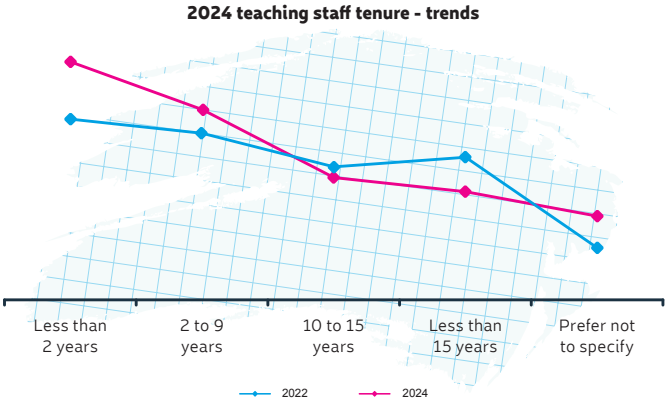
Key areas noted by parents where their expectations had not been met include:

- teaching staff turnover
- consistency in teaching quality
- substitute and relief teachers
- knowledge of the students and their needs
- providing an environment where the needs of students with varying abilities are met
- feedback on child's progress that is meaningful and helpful
- timeliness and response to examination and assessment results.

### Staff turnover

Teaching staff turnover has become an increasing challenge in many schools and noted to be higher for the senior years and in the core curriculum areas of English, Mathematics and Science. Schools are required at relatively short notice to find substitute or relief teachers who frequently may not have the knowledge and background of the students they are teaching in order to provide an effective transition and seamless continuity of teaching and learning experiences.

The chart below shows trends between 2022 and 2024 relating to staff tenure. The percentage of teaching staff noting they had been at their school for less than two years has increased by over 30 percent.




### Consistency in teaching quality

A major challenge for schools and of importance to parents relates to the consistency in the quality of teaching across subjects and classes. Parents evaluate teaching quality based on factors such as feedback on their child's progress, accessibility and responsiveness to concerns and the effectiveness of communication and engagement between parents and teachers. Parents also consider their child's enthusiasm for learning, the quality and clarity of academic reports and meetings, insights from discussions with teachers and other parents, and their child's academic performance and progress.

### Staff communication and feedback

Parents view communication and information on their child's progress as important attributes of teaching quality. Consistent, informative and timely feedback on their child's progress is an area where parent expectations tend not to be met. In addition to easy access to their child results, they expect to hear information that is specific to their child. In particular, if their child's grades have dropped in semester reports, they expect to understand the reasons why and what action is being taken.

### Addressing the challenges

Initiatives and strategies considered to build quality of teaching and reduce staff turnover include:

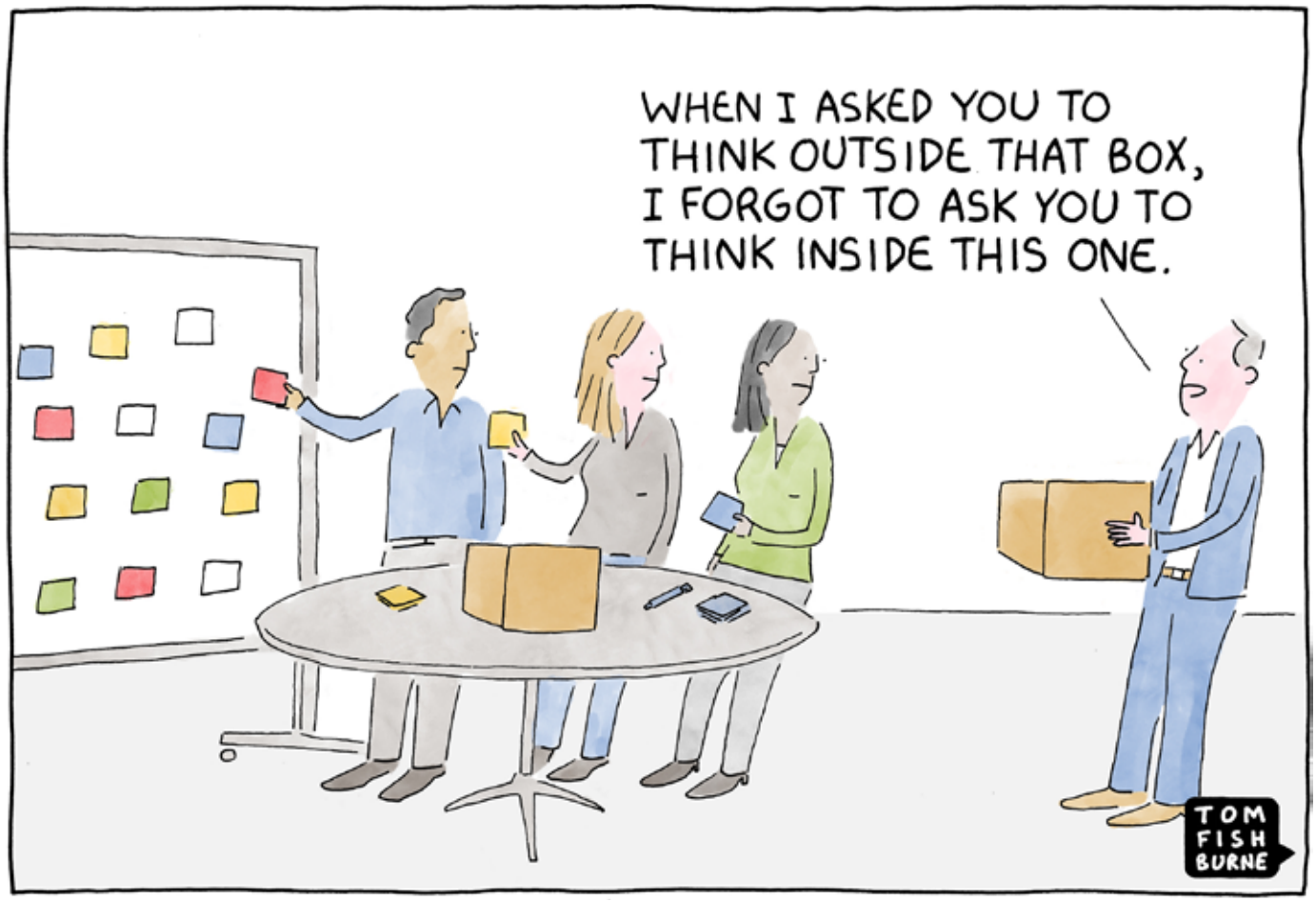
- providing an environment and culture where staff view the school as their first choice
- reviewing staff workload, equity and consistency
- reviewing drivers of staff stress and anxiety
- mentor programs for new teachers
- university engagement for graduate teacher programs and talent identification
- tailored, accessible and individual staff professional development initiatives
- quality working facilities and resources
- staff consultation on appropriate key areas
- work-life balance
- staff voice.

There is little doubt that the challenges facing schools regarding the provision of a consistently high standard of teaching will continue and require this area to remain a priority to ensure ongoing school of choice reputation from both parents and staff. ■



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# Brain **food**

**Writing or speaking for clarity and impact doesn't work like you were taught in university. That's why mastering the art of explanation is not optional – it's essential for school Heads.**

In *The Art of Explanation*, author and BBC presenter and journalist, Ros Atkins draws from his wealth of experience in newsrooms to provide practical strategies for conveying ideas with precision and confidence.

This book is particularly useful for school Heads facing the challenge of translating complex concepts into clear, engaging messages for diverse audiences – whether they be staff, parents or the broader community. Atkins' focus on simplicity helps you connect more effectively. His approach to keeping explanations simple yet informative can help you better connect with your school community.

For those long commutes or when you've exhausted all the *SMJ* podcast episodes (we know, it happens), the audiobook version of *The Art of Explanation* is a great alternative. ■



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