

So how does a school start marketing?

Five steps in effective marketing

“Marketing is everything a company does, from how they answer the phone, how quickly and effectively they respond to email, how they handle accounts payable, to how they treat their employees and customers...

In other words, marketing is not a discipline or an activity— it is everything a company is— at least if the company wants to be successful.”

B.L. Ochman, President
What’s Next

We've talked about why word of mouth is critical, and how that translates into the need to improve parent satisfaction and retention before expecting to increase enrollment. Now let's look at the process for making those things happen.

Step #1 -- Who are you?

Before you start promoting your school to your community you need to know who you are. Answering these questions yourself and with your board will help:

- Why do you exist?
- In what ways will a child be different after attending your school for eight or 12 years?
- What is in your DNA? Is non-negotiable?

Step #2 -- What do families want?

In order to have gloriously happy parents you need to know both what they need and what they want.

- **What do current families want?** I strongly recommend using the Parent Satisfaction and Referral Survey conducted by GraceWorks Ministries. If you don't have the budget for that find a way to get honest parent feedback that will be non-threatening for them (i.e. don't ask them yourself).
- **What did prior families want?** In September ask a board member to contact each family from the prior year who didn't return. For a page you can give board members with instructions and questions, [click here](#).

- **What is important to your community?** Since you will probably not have a budget for external market research, I suggest you get a group of long-term community members together and ask them this question.

Step #3 -- What needs to change?

This is the hard part. Look honestly at the feedback you've gotten and choose to change whatever annoys parents that is not core to who you are (which is why you need to start with step #1).

- **What can you change first that is visible but easy?** Find something to change that you can do quickly--then be sure to tell people about the change and thank them for giving you the feedback.
- **What can you change that will make the biggest impact on parent satisfaction?** Start now on the big issue as well--it will just take you longer to show results. Tell parents you are working on it (this is an excellent topic for your [weekly newsletter](#)) and give them periodic updates on your progress. They will understand it may take some time to revamp your billing system or your writing program.

Step #4 -- How do you tell your community?

This is the part most people think of as marketing--and they typically envision some type of advertising. But because of the high investment you are asking people to make (see “Why great word of mouth is essential”—The big picture, part 1), you need to focus on encouraging word of mouth and providing opportunities for potential parents to experience your school first hand (e.g. an winter [open house](#), a parent seminar on helping a child succeed in school, a spring-time skip up day, offering education success consults).

- **Who is your audience?** Who is God calling you to serve? Decide who you will be talking to.
- **What is the message?** By now you should know what makes your school different and special (in addition to being an Adventist school) as well as what your target audience is interested in. List tangible indicators of success in those areas of interest to your audience.
- **What call to action will you include?** Always give people a specific action or step to take in response to your promotion (e.g. Come to our open house on _____. Call _____ to set up an education success consult with our principal.)
- **What channels can you use?** Think about how you can involve parents and church members in promoting to the community through their personal lives and businesses.

Step #5 -- How do you track results?

Tracking results is a combination of tracking parent satisfaction, retention and enrollment annually, as well as tracking how much you are spending on each

promotional activity, how many leads each one is generating, how you are following up with each lead, and what percentage of leads are enrolling.

I know this is a very long Marketing Corner. Keep in mind, I don't expect you to do any of these things this week. Instead, just step back and look at the big picture of what marketing is.

Delegating:

These are not projects for this week so there is nothing here to delegate. (But you might share these ideas with your staff, board and key volunteers...)

Binder tab:

Put this in front of the January tab, after the pages for "The big picture" #1 and #2

School size: All

Marketing process step: This is a big picture overview of all five steps.

- 1) Who are we?
- 2) What do families want?
- 3) What needs to change?
- 4) How do we tell our community?
- 5) How do we track results?