

MARKETING MOMENT:

Who are you really trying to impress with your school's enrollment

Fashion experts determined long ago what can be confirmed by husbands and men in general: most women are more concerned with how other women – their peers – view their wardrobe or attire than how their husbands or the male population view their attire.

We see a similar dynamic in the way K-12 independent schools seek their peers' acceptance of their marketing rather than being concerned with what the parent and student *market* is interested in.

This fact can easily and quickly be tested by comparing the illustrations and copy in your school's admissions folders, brochures, view books, display advertising and other communications with other competing independent schools. Put all of the printed material and pictures side by side and simply swap the crest or school name with yours – you start to wonder if everyone's using the same template or just afraid to be different.

If you are a school who is progressively aware of the same reality that Patrick F. Bassett, NAIS President, identified for all North American independent schools in his published article: "Admissions: Closing the Deal – ...you can't make a sale if people do not think they need your product or if they do not even know it exists." Then you are probably very focused on separating your school's brand identity from the rest of the pack. Most schools proudly assume that people at least know that they exist, but does the market really know why they should be more interested in your school's product than some other nice looking and nice sounding independent school?

An effective strategic marketing plan will identify and respond to your market – engaging, educating and offering the customer what they want. The key to admitting and enrolling new students and exceeding expectations of your current enrollment, is to know your customers wants and needs; and play it back to them in your marketing.

In the world of successful selling the classic mantra is:

"When you see John Smith through John Smith's eyes, then you will sell John Smith what John Smith buys."

When it comes to the business of marketing for enrollment then we would say:

"When you see new families through new families' eyes, then you will enroll new families when others have tried."

So the first step to impress your customers with your school's marketing is to identify with your prospects and understand their current wants and needs. How do you know what your customers' wants and needs are? Ask them. – More on this in a future "ISPG Advisory."

Oh yes, returning to the subject of who women really dress to impress. It's those same peers and friends (other women) who they discuss their children's education and school needs with. Remember, the primary decision maker in selecting a school initially is the mother. Even in later years when the student factors in the determination of the level of satisfaction, the mother cannot be discounted in the school's CRM (customer relationship management).

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"Our Board was very pleased with the professional approach by David Dockstader and his team to identify and develop the vision for our school including our logo and identity package, brochures, admissions kits and public presentations. His extensive experience in working with independent schools gave us an advantage from the start and helped us maximize enrolment opportunities for Island Pacific Academy."

- Larry Caster, Board Chair, Island Pacific Academy
Kapolei, Hawaii)

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