

ADVISORY

BRANDING STRATEGIES TO POSITION YOUR SCHOOL

By Christina Drouin

1. Develop an outcome identity for your school's brand that goes beyond classroom success.

Many schools can benefit from more efforts to promote themselves as a continuum of learning opportunities. In drawing the upper school market, it is especially critical that schools develop an 'outcome identity' that goes beyond classroom success. Schools have attributes for promoting a distinct educational image that emphasizes their ability to compete. It is important to create visuals in all marketing media – print, electronic and atmospheric – that emphasize more strongly student outcomes and impacts that target 'next life experience'.

2. Position using Core Values.

To position itself differently through branding, a school should use its core values to fully understand and articulate a uniqueness that is easily identifiable and that makes it stand out among its competitors. To survive in a competitive environment, a school must possess a uniqueness that can be creatively packaged and marketed, but it needs to be truly understood in its new context before presenting it to the world.

3. Focus on the benefits of your school's educational experience.

Many schools can benefit from promoting brand images consistent with its educational offerings

and articulating the benefits those attributes contribute to a focused and meaningful experience for the student. There are significant groups of prospects who may not be aware of the scope of services and students served by your school's mission. A key strategy in positioning or repositioning any school is to focus on individual market segments and emphasize the benefits your school provides that are known to appeal to parents and students in these segments. When repositioning, develop a new brand position by determining what elements in the current brand position need to change to reflect updated perceptions and expectations and what key themes will support and enhance the new positioning.

4. Build visual brand identity.

Use key tactics of marketing communications to build brand identity:

- a. Develop message consistency, clarity, and repetition
- b. Use targeted media with matching demographics to reach market segments
- c. Communicate a strong visual identity manual
- d. Integrate print, electronic and relationship marketing programs and materials

5. Assess employee attitudes about new direction in branding.

As the school's best ambassadors of brand faculty, staff and administration need to be part of any resolve to branding and position the school. A plan to get this key group onboard is a priority.

6. Employ tactics to increase brand awareness through an integrated marketing system of print, electronic, event-based advertising, publicity and promotion segmented by market.

A. Target advertising

- Use a targeted advertising and communications strategy to reach market segments whose media habits and preferences are known to you
- Buy space in major publications of influence for institutional repositioning
- Buy space in trade journals whose demographics match primary and secondary markets
- Size and frequency count when buying advertising space; save your money if you can't afford to dominate the page and pay more for position
- Use re-branding and positioning strategies
- Remember to ask for a response or an action
- Use campaigns built on emotional appeal – 'put a face on it' through:
 - Student stories
 - Student spokespersons
 - Student outcomes

B. Step up promotion and personal contact

- Research and establish key strategic alliances with businesses, higher education, and feeder schools
- Increase visibility through service in the community and participation in events
- Develop creative and bold strategic alliances and cooperative marketing programs
- Concentrate on increasing campus visits among key target markets while maintaining yield
- Encourage visits from alumni and alumni families
- Blog
- Email
- Continuously revisit your search engine strategy and increase web presence
- Continuously update your mobile platform

C. Increase publicity

- Become the expert by writing column or submitting articles for publication in consumer and trade press
- Become the local 'go to' contact for education writers
- Develop a publicity plan
- Develop a photo strategy
- Schedule public service announcements
- Create placement opportunities through building relationships with local education writers/editors
- Seek article placement in trade journals read by target market segments
- Give interviews and speeches at events and through media channels

