

Is your school marketing plan just defending the present?

It's proven that successful and growing schools have established where they sit in the local and national market place. They also know that effectively marketing a school is a combination of knowing your product, quantifying its demand within a geographic market, identifying key customers (families), identifying actual or potential competitors, implementing general and targeted advertising campaigns, clearly identifying their schools unique selling points, and they do this using market research.

Why? It's a fact that effective marketing always begins with careful, systematic research. It is very dangerous to assume that you already know about your school's intended market especially if this is based on historical performance. In schools, like any other business, a mere point of view can be a perilous indulgence when substituted for awareness and knowledge. Families demands for an independent education are constantly changing and there is always a need to do research to make sure that you're not only on track for this year but that you have the market demand to sustain your school for many years to come. By taking the opportunity to use data and market research to question your marketing efforts, your time will be well spent.

Prove it!

MTM were recently commissioned by a school to understand the size of their potential market, the size of their actual current market share, and how it was likely to change over time. Included in our analysis were the changes in rolls of competitor schools in order to understand how they had fared. This report was specifically commissioned by the new Director of Admissions and Marketing to underpin a brand new strategic marketing plan.

The data we provided showed that over half of their nursery pupils travelled less than 10 minutes to the school (this is the norm for this age group), whilst almost three quarters of the remaining junior and senior pupils travelled for less than 20 minutes. This was unsurprising considering the location of this school. We also found that almost two thirds of their current families were classified by us as "aspirational" which meant that both parents were likely to be working.

Overall the school appeared to have a good share of its local market, particularly within the 20 minute catchment. However, we found that there were significant pockets of potential slightly further afield, which were largely untouched. MTM highlighted that targeting recruitment activities and increasing strategic bus routing in these areas would help increase the schools market share. Our data also showed that planned residential construction also presented an opportunity for the school.

In another case MTM was instructed by a co-ed all through day school to undertake a survey of current parents.

MTM found out that parents chose this school for its very good academic results.

We also found out that almost all respondents either would or currently do recommend the school. The reputation was also how over half of the respondents found out about the school. This aligned with the schools recent efforts to focus on internal marketing.



The survey also

highlighted the following priorities for improvement.

Respondents had mixed opinions about communication at the school and raised concerns about the content of report cards, and were looking for more regular updates regarding their child's progress. Communication about extracurricular activities was also cited as an area requiring improvement.

Respondents also highlighted navigability issues with the school website and difficulty in using the parent portal.

After we delivered the research the school made immediate changes to resolve these issues and a recent repeat survey has shown that parents are now more satisfied.

Use your data: plan for tomorrow, today

Strategy is about questions - where next? what next? how many? how much? who for? when do we do it? Governors, Heads and Senior Teams are all asking questions and everyone is looking for answers.

So is your school taking a glimpse into the future? What changes are you making today to plan for tomorrow? Better yet, how are you taking those changes and shaping the future?

In school marketing today's chaotic times can be confusing and complex. It can however, it can also be the best thing for you because it forces you to change, transform and evolve. It creates new and better opportunities—a new and better school brand.

Notice:

We are sad to say Claire is no longer working with MTM. We wish her the best of luck for the future.

Making a success of going international

Many UK independent – and a few state schools – have considered setting up overseas branches.

Is there still a market for UK independent schools to expand overseas? **Undoubtedly.**

Are there pitfalls and dangers along the way? **Definitely.**

So what are the risks involved and how can they be mitigated?

Choose the right partner

The most important decision you make is your choice of partner. There are many ways to find a partner. There could be a parental or governor connection, a former student connection, an approach out of the blue, a Head of School determined to find a partner or a referral from an educational body. However when the initial contact is made, the golden rule to apply is – if it doesn't feel right, don't do it. Personal relationships are key and if it's hard work at the beginning, it will be hard work all the way through. The partner must have exemplary local and national credentials and connections in the overseas country with excellent local knowledge. Lack of clarity about ownership of land, building rights and sources of investment capital are often eventual stumbling blocks and must be established as soon as possible.

Good local and national connections mean more than anything.

Do your research

It's crucial to carry out proper due diligence concerning a prospective partner. Some information will be in the public domain and some can be obtained from specialised agencies such as MTM. Be aware of local norms and ways of working: be realistic in your expectations, but also be true to your own values.

Don't be over ambitious, be realistic

Among other more laudable motives for looking overseas, many schools will be entering the international scene to open up new channels of income for the home school. Exaggerated claims of deals abound. Many are just that and many deals have fallen apart after a great deal of time-consuming work due to over-ambitious expectations of future income for the home school.

Expect to have to spend some money

Trying to expand overseas cannot be done without some expenditure. This may include the time of the Head of School and other staff assigned to advance this initiative, so budget for flights, accommodation overseas, support services at the UK school and legal costs. Eventually, it may be possible to negotiate that the overseas partner should pay an amount towards the school's ongoing costs but it is likely this will be insufficient to cover all costs involved in an ongoing relationship. Do, however, be wary of inappropriate hospitality and be careful to maintain your independence.

Location, Location, Location

As with all issues involving real estate, where the overseas school is to be located is of crucial importance to its success in the short and long term. Often the UK school will have no option regarding location. The deal is presented and no negotiation over location is possible. It is therefore crucial that a detailed feasibility study on the proposed location including assessment of demand in that location is conducted prior to agreement. For more information on how MTM can help with this, email office@emrsolutions.co.uk



PAUL CABRELLI is an international consultant based in London. Paul gives advice to international & independent schools on a wide range of business, financial & governance issues. He has worked extensively with leading stand-alone international schools & private independent schools planning overseas expansion.

Get a good lawyer

Do not scrimp on legal advice or use your local lawyer who has no experience of conducting overseas deals. Don't use a lawyer with inappropriate overseas experience – for example in hotels, office blocks or housing complexes. Some international lawyers have specialised in arranging international school deals. Find them and use them.

Be reasonable in your educational expectations but set minimum standards

Decide early on what your "red line" issues are. Be clear about them and don't deviate from them. These could involve teacher: student ratios, examination systems, class sizes, language of instruction, accreditation board to be used, the day student/boarding students, or gender mix.

Once you have established your red line issues, be reasonable in your other expectations. Some overseas partners may want certain elements to be included: single sex schools, certain languages taught, a religious bias, or boarding only. If these elements are not red line issues for you then accept and embrace them, but make sure they are all properly costed in the feasibility study.

Don't proceed unless everyone is on-board and be in it for the long haul

It is crucial that the senior leadership team and the governing body of the UK school are fully committed to the establishment of the overseas school. If there are dissenting views, these must be assuaged before moving ahead or the project will fail.

The enthusiasm of the UK Head of School is essential to the success of the overseas school. Regard the overseas collaboration as a long term project and appreciate that there may be short term blips and hurdles along the way.

Accept that the overseas school can never be a replica of the UK school

The overseas school will likely be very different from the UK school. Differences may include any or all of land area, facilities, language of instruction, other languages taught, gender mix, sports taught, musical instruments taught, examinations systems, religious affiliation, year groups at the school and teacher mix. As long as your key philosophical requirements are met, do not be overly concerned with this, embrace the differences.

Good governance is crucial

Give considerable thought to governance structure. Will there be a local board? What will the structure of that board be? Will the UK school have representation on the local board? Is attendance at the local board sufficient? Will the UK school make "inspection" style visits to the school?

So, yes, there are very exciting possibilities in developing an overseas partnership for your school but go into the process with your eyes wide open and your expectations pitched realistically. To speak to Paul, email paul@paceeduc.com

What's the secret behind a successful marketing campaign? The formula is simple: a great idea, careful research and planning, realistic objectives, and the management of the campaign itself.

The Why

The How

Set KPIs in relation to business needs and create highly detailed goals – I recommend using the SMART process: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed. The more detailed your goals, the easier it is to measure the progress and achieve your objectives. However, it is important to manage expectations and ensure that any promises you make are achievable. ‘Under promise, over deliver’ is always a winner.

Build your brand name and use it everywhere. When setting up online ad campaigns this is your unique keyword and will have a low bid.



The Dedicated Landing Page

- Your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) – Headline and reinforcement statement;
- Your hero image – photograph or video;
- Benefits on offer – Summarise with bullet points (use accordion menus to elaborate);
- Evidence – a third party recommendation;
- Your call to action to easily convert from view to action.

The Management of Campaign Results

Please don't just set the campaign going and move on to something else until it's finished – you would be amazed how many do – the results need regular monitoring to make timely changes. If the campaign is not producing the desired results, reassess and implement changes to improve its effectiveness; re-wording a title can make all the difference and you can continue to adjust until it performs.

As soon as the campaign has finished, gather your team together to discuss and evaluate the process and results. This really helps when planning your next campaign. Good results should never be taken for granted, the reasons need exploring so you can repeat the successful formula of what works for you.

Don't despair if you didn't achieve what you wanted, again this is a learning curve in preparation for next time.

The Nurturing of New Leads

The ultimate reason for most school marketing campaigns is to increase recruitment applications. Part of any campaign call to action should be the capturing of an email addresses of those who respond so that you can keep in touch on a regular basis. Create a database of prospective parents with year of entry details and, depending on their child's interests, invite them to music events, drama productions, sports activities, etc. Create special 'Fundays', 'Bring a friend to weekend boarding', etc, as tasters giving potential pupils a flavour of school life to help tip that conversion factor in your favour.

For help with your marketing campaign contact Sally Anne Rogers hello@sallyannerogers.com



To outsource or not to outsource – that is THE question

Good market research is essential for schools. By determining families' demands you can target your advertising and marketing ensuring that you meet (and even exceed) their expectations, continually fuelling the positive word of mouth lifecycle.

Successful independent schools undertake regular market research to ensure they are ahead of the curve if there is a change in attitudes, perceptions, and awareness amongst their key stakeholders. This in turn allows them to react quickly and be seen to act before any damage is done to the school brand.

Having accurate research is crucial in underpinning marketing and advertising campaigns taking into account the needs of your target market as well as the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors.

Things you should consider when debating whether to call us Have you got the in-house expertise?

The undertaking of reliable and valid market research can be a full-time job. If you are undertaking this internally consider the cost of work not done and opportunities that might be lost if your own resources and employees are diverted into doing market research. Do your staff really have the qualifications, expertise and up to date knowledge necessary to produce the market research that meets your aims?

Are you really getting the full story?

We know that parents tend to be much more candid when talking to us than they would be if they were surveyed by the school. Despite being assured that all responses are anonymous parents fear that revealing the truth may impact on their child's life at the school.

Have you weighed up the upfront cost versus long term gain?

When thinking about budgets don't just think in academic years. Don't forget if the results of undertaking market research drive changes which ultimately bring more children through the school gates (even if this isn't until the new academic year) the long term financial gains outweigh the upfront expense.

Are we a match? – Things we want you to ask us

- What's our experience? How do we work with schools? Do we understand independent school parents?
- Do we understand your objectives? Do we know what you want and understand the significance of these aims to your school?
- What methods will we use? Focus groups, demographic analysis, interviews, surveys? The strategy we take in gathering the data will determine how reliable and applicable it will be to your school.

MTM have the methods, strategies, and expertise in place to conduct your market research efficiently and effectively, producing results that your school can instantly integrate into future strategic planning improving return on investment of each and every marketing campaign. To find out how MTM can help you, email james@emrsolutions.co.uk



Case Study: Understand your Alumni

The Lady Eleanor Holles is an independent day school for girls in Hampton. They recently commissioned MTM to undertake an Alumni survey on their behalf. We spoke to Jenny Blaiklock, Director of Development and Communications to find out why...

What have been Lady Eleanor Holles' greatest achievements this year?

Complete rebranding of school, new marketing materials and advertising, 400% increase in use of social media.

What inspired you to sign up to do an online Alumni survey? What were your main objectives?

Desire to understand how we can increase engagement with our alumnae and provide them with the information and events that they'd like to receive from the school.

What are you going to do with the results of the survey?

Present the findings to Governors and use it to inform our alumnae communications and programme of events.

Do you think independent schools engage enough with their alumni?

No! The alumnae are a huge resource in terms of potential mentors for current students and donors.

Do you believe that marketing and development departments in schools should be working more closely together?

Yes. Our works completely in synch and is overseen by a Development and Communications Director who is on the SMT

What do you think the future holds for development professionals in independent schools?

They will become increasingly important, as schools seek to finance bursaries and capital projects from charitable donations rather than increasing fees.

**Talk to MTM about our alumni surveys
office@emrsolutions.co.uk**

Ian McLean commented.....

"A development office should maintain a constant focus and awareness of its alumni base through a range of activities. Research on its own is not sufficient to provide the school with a motive or readiness to make a fundraising approach. This has the potential to sour a friendship. Combining research, knowledge and opportunities for engagement provides the basis for a productive relationship and this is often built over time, not simply by virtue of a wealth screening survey. Unfortunately, there are examples where a short term view is taken with little commitment and resourcing for the longer term. Schools under these circumstances often find themselves trying to connect and seek support without engagement and the warmth of relationship."

With 26 years of international experience in fundraising, development and marketing, Ian McLean provides a personalised and exclusive management service, to enhance every aspect of development, fundraising and alumni work within UK and international schools. To find out how Ian can help you, email irm@ianmclean.org.uk

Successful alumni relations



Andy Wood is Director of Education at Graham-Pelton Consulting, a full-service fundraising and non-profit management firm serving its clients from offices in London, Dublin, Scotland and across the USA. Andy can be contacted at awood@grahampelton.com. Follow Graham-Pelton on LinkedIn for more insight and news from the sector.

The continued growth of successful alumni relations and development activity in schools in recent years is to be celebrated. Every school can only benefit from such an increase – both financially through philanthropic support, and non-financially in myriad ways.

However, a note of caution needs sounding. Many schools have enjoyed (or endured) stop-start affairs in this particular area, and those with aspirations to transform the future of their schools through philanthropic or in-kind support from alumni, parents and other supporters need to both learn from the tribulations of the past and acknowledge the challenges of the future.

Largely, school development and alumni operations are small teams with a wide brief, often including important commercial activities which mean alumni engagement and fundraising are frequently placed on the back burner. Relationships – so crucial in realising the potential of your would-be supporters – go cold; staff move on, databases stagnate, and the next incumbent has largely the same start-up challenge as his or her predecessor.

Many of these pitfalls can be addressed through targeted, strategic, and often modest, investment, but it is the hub of any such activity which presents the most concerning future challenge – the database.

Changes to fundraising and data protection regulation present a very real challenge to the unprepared. At stake is an organisation's ability to communicate with its alumni and supporters unless it has their explicit consent. If ever there were a time to grasp the development nettle, it is now.

The decision to review and/or invest in this function will likely influence the futures of schools, universities and charities for years to come. Those which do will be able to engage with these invaluable supporters to help realise their ambitions. Those which don't will likely look on enviously at their peers enjoying the fruits of the blossoming relationships with their supporters and think 'if only'.



Facebook Live, is it worth the hype?

There is a veritable smorgasbord of social media apps and sites that we are told that we **must have** to stay ahead of the game, but is Facebook Live one of them?

Facebook Live is a broadcast platform within the site that allows you to post videos, and comments as a live feed. It's simple to use, with a "live" button at the bottom of your status update box, simply push the button, title your broadcast, and start recording.

So, we know it is simple to use, but is it worth it? In a word, yes. Of course, this is all subject to your school, and the interaction and engagement you have with your parents, but the possibilities really are endless.

With Facebook Live you could share important messages and updates from the Head, broadcast special events, showcase your schools afterschool clubs and activities, all as they happen. This could be more beneficial than say the one video you might have on your school website as it encourages interaction and reaches a wider target audience, especially if you plan accordingly and in advance.

Before just launching in and getting a video up as soon as possible, it is important to have a clear purpose, and understanding of your target market. What do your parents, both current and prospective want to see? This is where a little bit of research could be useful. Do your parents want the ability to see the Christmas play live, would they like an update from the Head about new initiatives, or would they like to see what your extracurricular activities offer their child?

Once you have established the need, you need to create the content, but by following these simple five steps you soon will have a successful video:

1. Decide on your audience
2. Build anticipation.
3. Get to the point, and keep it interesting
4. Interact with your viewers
5. Analyse your results.

We would love to know how you get on! Let us know at office@emrsolutions.co.uk.



At MTM we recently undertook a piece of our own market research and found that many schools still simply did not know what we did! After talking to some key clients and continuing our commitment to taking steps into the future we have decided to adopt our parent company name **Education Market Research Solutions** going forward. We'd love to hear your feedback!
Email james@emrsolutions.co.uk