School Masters Guide to

Enrolling More Students

Strategies for Student Enrollment in the Digital Age

kreativewebworksinc.

Every Student has a Shelf Life

Congratulations on sending another young mind out into the world to flourish and be all they are destined to be. You and your staff are passionate about sharing ideas, communicating concepts, and inspiring conversation. Preparing our youth for the rest of their lives is a passion...**but it's also a business**.

As you congratulate yet another graduating class, or say goodbye to students who move on for their own reasons, the businessperson in you realizes that you need to enroll more students just to keep pace with the needs of the school.

Your interests probably do not lay in developing marketing strategies for your school. In fact, marketing and admissions may be a real source of stress and anxiety for you. You are not a marketing expert and making important decisions about how to spend your limited marketing budget can be very difficult and even frustrating.

Perhaps you gravitate to traditional forms of marketing simply because that's the way the school has always done it. Or because you don't really have the human resources to explore anything else. Meanwhile, the education landscape is becoming increasingly more competitive. Not only do parents have more choices, they may be looking where you aren't.

Why Traditional Marketing No Longer Works for Schools

Traditional marketing used to work because it wasn't competing with the shifting behavioral habits and all the different attention-grabbing options people have today. In particular, parents of school aged children are now plugged in to their electronic devices like it was a physical appendage.

No one does this anymore

People used to spend a lot of time on a few media, like phonebooks, magazines, television, radio, newspapers and billboards. Now people spend a little time on a lot of media, like different websites, mobile apps, search engines, blogs and social media.

You may indeed be enjoying some degree of success using traditional techniques. However, you are restricted by the natural limitations of "**Spray and Pray**" marketing which is targeted geographically, not demographically.

Are You Relying on These Traditional Marketing Strategies?

Direct Mail: The cost of design, printing and postage makes this a costly proposition. Unless you have a highly-targeted mailing list, these miniature master-pieces are headed to the recycle bin.

Billboards: Good for repeated exposure during repetitious commutes, but it zips by too fast to take note of anything meaningful.

Radio: Satellite radio and personal playlists that stream to your car are making terrestrial radio obsolete. No one with school aged children sits through commercials in their cars anymore.

Television: Local Cable advertising rates are not unreasonable, but you have no control over who is on the other end of the TV. By the way, most people record their programs, and fast forward through everything that isn't their program. That includes your commercial...

Traditional Advertising is More Expensive

Most traditional advertising is based on interrupting, or "inserting" your message into people's daily lives. Unfortunately, even when your message does get through to the right person, they may not be able to react to it at that moment.

According to HubSpot, Social Media is the #1 marketing channel in 2022, with Facebook and Instagram resulting in the biggest ROI.

This generation of parents of school aged children no longer tolerate or trust this type of messaging. They want, and they are used to, getting information on demand. They don't want to be sold to, they want help solving their problems, on their terms.

Traditional Advertising is More Expensive

For example, the average cost of a 30-second spot on KLOS radio in Los Angeles is $1,083 for a single 30-second spot. Based on $3.50 per visitor for Google Ads (for reference only), that would translate to roughly 433 actual visitors to your website.

The difference is, those 309 visitors were actually searching for a school, whereas your radio spot was broadcast to anyone who just might be listening at the time. Additionally, once your spot has aired, it is done regardless if your target market heard it or not.

Stats & Facts

In 2020, the US population spent an average of seven hours and 54 minutes per day consuming digital media.
(OBERLO)

Google received over 9 million searches per minute in 2022.
(LocaliQ)

Social media accounted for 33% of all digital advertising spending in 2022, topping out at $134B
(Hootsuite)

Personalized Call to Actions (CTAs) convert 202% better than default versions.
(HubSpot)

Budgets and Spending

An estimated 566 billion U.S. dollars were projected to be spent on digital advertising worldwide in 2022, and this figure is forecast to increase at a rapid pace in the upcoming years
(Statista)

According to The 2022 CMO Survey, CMOs allocate 57 percent of their budgets to digital marketing activities and are planning to increase spending by another 16 percent in 2023.
(The CMO Survey)

Social media accounted for 33% of all digital advertising spending in 2022. And annual advertising spends on social media topped $134 billion in 2022, an increase of over 17% YOY That's an additional $23 billion!
(Hootsuite)

PART 2

So, What works?

School marketing today takes a 360° integrated strategy.

A strategy that pulls together elements of Site, Search & Social. A great website that leads a perspective family on a journey, a well thought out search strategy to be in front of parents and students when they are searching for you, and a strategic social media plan to draw parents to your message.

Your Marketing Plan Roll-up

This is the same core strategy that we use for all our education sector clients. Virtual schools may use a more aggressive version of this same strategy because they are unencumbered by the 4 walls of a classroom, and typically have a larger marketing area.

- Branding & Messaging
- Great Performance Based Website
- Pay-Per-Click (Google Ads) Search Campaigns
- Retargeting & Display Advertising
- Facebook & Instagram Advertising
- Strategic Landing Page Design
- Live Chat & Messenger Marketing
- Online Directory Optimization
- Social Media Publishing & Content Curation
- Customer Reviews Acquisition
- Google Analytics & Webmaster Tools Set-up
- Marketing Automation (advanced strategy)

Start with a Great Website

Your Website is the Hub of all your online marketing activity - it's even a destination for offline marketing. Sooner or later every family that is considering your school will eventually wind up on your website.

> " *Your Website is the Hub of all your online marketing activity* "

Sending good traffic (motivated parents or students) to a bad or mediocre website is not only a waste of time and money but can do more harm than good. If they don't like what they see, they won't be coming back. Here are the Minimum Requirements for an effective school website:

Here's what we know about how today's parents use websites:

They have the attention span of a goldfish

They are on smartphones more than desktops

They LOVE visual content more than ever

They want clear, easy to find answers

They LOVE a user-friendly experience

No patience, they love speed & convenience

39% of people will stop engaging with a website if images won't load or take too long to load.

75% of consumers admit to making judgements on a company's credibility based on the company's website design

61% of users are unlikely to return to a site on mobile if they had trouble accessing it and 40% visit a competitor's site instead

38% of people will stop engaging with a website if the content or layout are unattractive

Mobile First: As far back as May 2015, Google reported that there were more searches on mobile devices than desktop computers. This has only increased and is especially true of students and parents of school aged children.

Intuitive Navigation: Organize your content so that parents can quickly locate the information they are looking for in no more than 2 clicks when feasible.

20% For every 2 seconds a page takes to load, conversions drop by 20%

50% Poor user experience drives almost 50% of users to go with a competitor.

36% will click on the school's logo to reach the Home page when arriving from a referral site

47% of website visitors check out the programs page before looking at any other sections of the site.

Images: Use high quality images that tell a story or set the mood. Do NOT use gratuitous images just for the sake of filler.

Readability: People don't read on the Internet, they scan. They see headlines, images and bullet points. Parents will read more because of the importance of the decision, however, structure your content to "spoon feed" the content to them by organizing it in logical progressions.

66% would rather read something beautifully designed than something plain over a 15-minute period

86% of visitors want to see information about that school's programs once on their Home Page

50% will use the navigation menu to orient when arriving from a referral site

70% of readers want a reading time under 6-minutes. Avoid "information dumps" and be concise as possible

Layout: Uncluttered. Whitespace is very powerful. It should be comfortable to browse through your site without having to face massive blocks of text. If it looks good on your smartphone, it will probably look great on your computer. The reverse is not always true.

Message: You MUST make the case that your school is the logical, best choice. Benefits before features is best practice.

For more detail on how you can make your school's website more effective, get
Your Free Website Audit
(right click to open in new window)
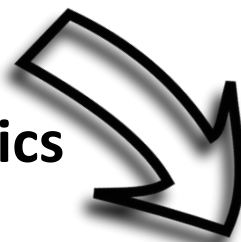
Strategy First!

You wouldn't build a house without a blueprint, why would you start your school's marketing without one?

Taking a "strategy-first" approach saves time and money and vastly increases your chances of meeting your enrollment goals.

A comprehensive digital strategy should start by defining (in writing) your target personas along with a thorough analysis of your current web presence, including both technical and messaging aspects of your website, your school's reputation, and an analysis of competing schools.

After you have completed your web-presence analysis and site audit, you can move onto designing your integrated enrollment marketing strategy.
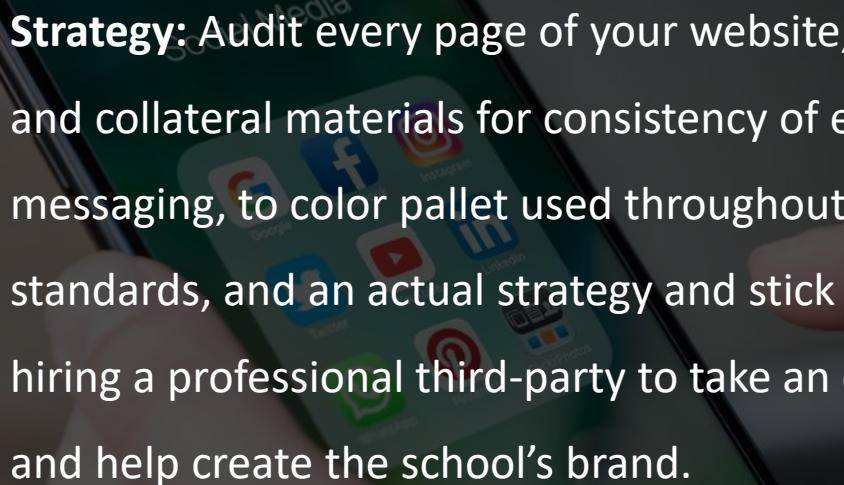
Our Top 10 Marketing Tactics

Tactic #1: Branding & Messaging

Description: A known "brand" inspires confidence and comfort. Your school needs to become a brand. Achieving that requires consistency in every aspect how the school is portrayed to distinguish it from other school choices.

Advantages: Good branding elevates the school and builds recognition and loyalty. Parents and students are attracted to brands that share similar values with them. When you showcase what you value through branding, families will develop an emotional connection to you.

Strategy: Audit every page of your website, social platforms and collateral materials for consistency of everything from messaging, to color pallet used throughout. Create a set of standards, and an actual strategy and stick to it. Consider hiring a professional third-party to take an objective look and help create the school's brand.

Tactic #2: Performance Based Website

Description: A schools' website should be more than a repository of information. It should invoke an emotional connection that is inline with the school's brand and messaging. From a marketing perspective, it should be strategically designed around the parent's "buying" journey.

Advantages: A well-designed school website accurately reflects the school's culture, distinguishes it from other schools and creates a sense of familiarity and confidence. A well designed, performance-based website will stimulate inquiries from families seeking a new school that meets their vision.

Strategy: School websites tend to grow organically like an unplanned community. Somewhere along the line the message gets lost, as does the parent or student visiting the site. Start by commissioning an audit from a third-party who is willing to work with your internal teams.

NOTE: Each month we **donate 4 site audits** specifically to schools. Request yours here:

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WebScan™ for Schools

Tactic #3: Google Ads

Description: PPC (Google Ads) is a paid advertising model and the single fastest way to drive targeted traffic to specific pages on your website. As the name implies, you pay only when someone clicks on your search result and goes to your website. Essentially, it's a way of buying visits to your site, rather than attempting to "earn" those visits organically.

Advantages: You have a high degree of control over what the parent who is searching for "school" related keywords will see. You write the ads, control the bid management, and define the geographic target area where the ads will show up on the search results page. You can also accumulate a lot of data about what is working and what isn't.

Strategy: Our strategy for a Brick & Mortar school is to target the specific geographic area that a parent would typically travel to commute their child. For a Virtual School, we would target the geographic areas the school is chartered to operate in. We would send the traffic directly to the Home page or to a custom landing page.

Best practice is to create multiple "ad groups" focusing on a variety of criterion such as, the sciences, college prep, anti-bullying, etc. Keywords should be categorized into groups. Each group should have a series of "ads" that rotate. Each ad should map to a specific landing page that relates back to the parent's initial search term.

Watch the 3-minute Video for more detail:

Tactic #4: Retargeting & Display Advertising

Description: A paid advertising model. When a parent visits your website, regardless of the means (Search Engine Optimization, Pay-Per-Click marketing, email, or directly through a browser) we "tag" them. As they go about their business visiting other websites over the next hours, days or weeks, we show them your custom banner ad. Your school's brand literally follows them around for less than a penny per impression. The same technology can be employed to parents who have searched on your keywords but didn't necessarily go to your website.

Advantages: Your most valuable prospects are the ones that have already sought you out. If a parent already visited your website, they must have an interest in your school. They just weren't ready to engage you YET. Retargeting technology reminds them of why they sought you out in the first place.

Strategy: Education is a big decision for a parent, and typically not one made impulsively. You will get many spontaneous contacts from first-time visitors, however many more are doing preliminary research. Retargeting will keep your school top of mind throughout the parent's evaluation process.

Watch the 3-minute Video for more detail: ▶

Tactic #5: Social Media Advertising

Description: A paid advertising model with many options to show up in front of your pre-defined target audience while parents are going about their business on Facebook or Instagram. Your ads will show up in the newsfeed on both desktop and mobile.

Advantages: Meta (Facebook & Instagram) knows everything about everyone. They have all our demographic information from when we signed up, and they even know what we like and what we don't, so this is a very targeted strategy. Social media is very effective when done strategically.
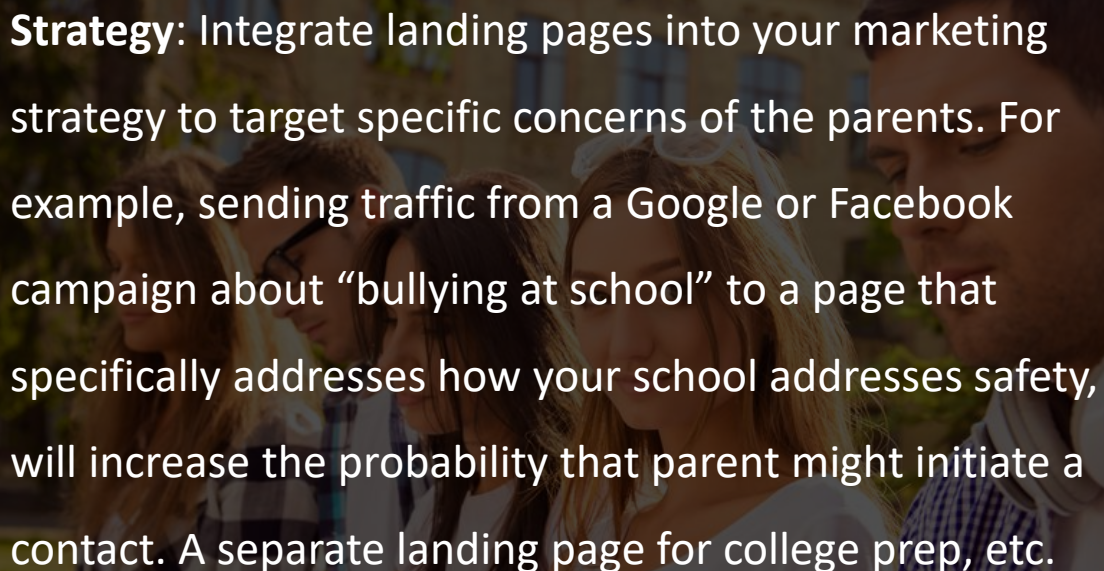
Strategy: Leverage Facebook's information to show your sponsored posts to a predefined demographic (for example; females in a defined age range, with children in a specific demographic area). We aren't looking for "Likes" and "Shares", we will drive the traffic directly to the Home page, or to a custom landing page with a suitable Call-To-Action.

Tactic #6: Landing Page Design

Description: Landing pages differ from regular pages on your website in that they are designed for a single purpose with minimal distractions. They are designed as a destination page to receive traffic from a specific source.

Advantages: Creating different landing pages for different campaigns will most likely increase your conversions because they were specific to what the parent was searching on.

If run in conjunction with an advanced marketing automation strategy, the landing page would include a form that the parent might fill out to download a guide, or eBook, or other piece of premium content. Thus adding them to your contact database where your marketing automation software nurtures the lead.

Strategy: Integrate landing pages into your marketing strategy to target specific concerns of the parents. For example, sending traffic from a Google or Facebook campaign about "bullying at school" to a page that specifically addresses how your school addresses safety, will increase the probability that parent might initiate a contact. A separate landing page for college prep, etc.

Tactic #7: Search Engine Optimization

Description: SEO is the ongoing process of optimizing a website to show up in the "natural" (non-paid) search results of Google, Yahoo and Bing. This typically includes the "Maps" sections of the search results. Effective SEO is based on advanced keyword research, content, social sharing and technical fundamentals.

Advantages: Showing up in the natural search results is a long-term strategy because it is not reliant on a paid model. It is also typically associated with more credibility because it is an "earned" ranking, not a paid advertisement. When combined with a paid advertising program, you can dominate multiple areas of the search results.

Strategy: Start with the technical fundamentals (Site structure, crawl errors and core meta content, etc.) and produce high-quality content around what parents are searching for. SEO is somewhat co-dependent on other tactics, such as Data aggregation and Social Media publishing and content curation. Achieving and maintaining a top ranking is an ongoing process.

Tactic #8: Online Directory Optimization

Description: Search engines rely heavily on top tier, and local directories to verify your information and assign authority to a website. These listings must be completely accurate, verified, and without duplicates or conflicts. Some of these directories carry more weight than others, and influence second tier directories.

Advantages: Extremely effective in boosting the search rankings, brand awareness and overall web presence of a website, particularly a local website. It typically also results in additional traffic from consumers using these directories.

Strategy: Start by agreeing to, and standardizing all your school contact data. Then locate, verify and complete all your directories, adding images and descriptions where required. Locate duplicate content and remove it. We use the Moz.com/Local software. This is a good tool to locate your listings, but you still must maintain them yourself.

Tactic #9: Parent Review Acquisition

Description: Reviews are naturally skewed negative because most people will not think to leave a review when they get what they expect. However, 88% of Consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.

Advantages: By proactively seeking out reviews from parents who are happy with the school, you can re-shuffle the deck and gain a strategic advantage by reassuring parents that your school is the proper choice for their child.

Strategy: Create a list of parents that you suspect will give your school a stellar review, and simply ask them in a personal way. Make it easy for them by providing links to your Google reviews page, Yelp, Great Schools, etc. This is a stand-alone service that we offer to our school clients.

Tactic #10: Live Chat & Messenger Marketing

Description: The parents of school aged children are accustomed to texting, and thus are often more comfortable communicating by tapping out letters on a device. Nothing is more effective than an active conversation with an inquiring parent when they want information on their terms.

Advantages: Chat comes in two flavors; "live" and "Artificial Intelligence" (A.I.). Nothing beats a real-time conversation with a parent or student, but when admissions isn't around, the "bot" can be programed to have a conversation, get contact info, and even direct them to download a lead magnet or piece of premium content.

Strategy: At a minimum, install chatbot software on your website, program it to ask for contact info when no one is around, and make sure that your admissions team has access to carry out live conversations when they are available.

Pro-tip #1: hire a professional to design the bot to carry out more complex conversations.

Pro-tip #2: Integrate with Facebook messenger marketing because if they leave without giving their contact info, you won't have it....but Facebook will!

Making it Happen

Digital advertising can be amazingly effective if done strategically with the appropriate budget. But if you make a mistake or pursue an ineffective strategy, no one is giving you a refund. That's why we created our **Digital Marketing Blueprint for Schools**.

Watch this 4-minute video to lean more

Our special pricing for schools and our satisfaction guarantee make our **Digital Marketing Blueprint** virtually risk-free.

Final Thoughts & Recommendations

Final Thoughts & Recommendations

Based on age and the shifting behavioral patterns of parents of school aged children, we know that traditional marketing no longer works as it once did.

We also know that Digital Marketing techniques do work, but only as part of an integrated strategy that addresses all aspects of what we call "Site, Search & Social".

A great website does you no good unless parents find it. Conversely, sending perfectly good traffic to a poor or mediocre website is a waste of that traffic because it won't convert parents into enrollments.

Whether you enlist the help of a professional school marketing agency like us or bring it in-house and start your own marketing department, you will need to do an analysis of where you are now so you can develop your strategy.

You will need information on the structural integrity of your website, where you rank for important keywords, and how you relate to competing schools in your area.

Does Your Website Make the Grade?

Are the other schools on the playground eating your lunch?
We can tell you why, and what you can do about it with our
FREE **WebScan**™ Website analysis.

WebScan™ for Schools

Yes, It's free for schools