



# LEADING THE JOURNEY

An E-newsletter on *EXCELLENCE* in Leadership

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*Answer the  
question;  
what sets you  
apart from  
other schools  
in your  
community?*

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## The Essentials of a Well-Rounded Marketing & Enrollment Program

*Dan Krause, President, GraceWorks Ministries*

What are the absolute essentials in increasing the enrollment of Christian schools around the country? After working with hundreds of Christian schools in the last decade, we boil it down to just six areas. Alphabetically, they are: **Branding, Closing more leads, Generating more leads, Healthy tuition / Reasonable financial aid, Quality program, and Retaining more students.**

Since I am writing to educators, here is a pop quiz. In marketing, what is the correct priority for each of these six? Take a moment now to prioritize, because it really, really matters. (*Incidentally, what is Facebook's priority here?*)

**Branding at its essence is WHAT THEY THINK OF YOU.**

Who are THEY? They are all of your school's constituent groups – parents (prospective and current), students (present, past or non-enrolling), donors, constituent church members, pastors, board members, and ecclesiastical authorities. Branding is far, far more than a new logo, better letterhead, and a redesigned website.

The top two ways to improve your brand are: (1) Focus on ends: how students are or will be different as a consequence of their time with you. *Model student outcomes, your champion alumni* - shout these from the mountain tops! Note: Ultimately this is a "God question." (2) Hit programmatic HOMERUNS in the areas your competition is weak, starting with Christian character.

**To close more leads, GET MORE PEOPLE INTO THE**

**BUILDING.** That is the goal of everything you do. "Enroll now" is a waste, whether on a sign or a website. They do not know you, they have to visit first. Do Educational Success Consultations (ESC) with the PRINCIPAL. (GraceWorks pioneered the concept.) Do informal, interactive open houses. Your website should have NO reasons for these families to stay home, NONE, starting with your tuition rates. Get it off the website! *Make them call ... and set up an appointment to visit when they do.*

**The big four in Generating more leads are: (1) Word of mouth (WOM), (2) Church marketing, (3) Internet, and (4) Guerrilla marketing.** *Even in our social media world, over 90% of WOM still happens the old fashioned way. (See my [blog](#).)* Our research clearly shows that the average Christian school has a satisfaction rating higher than Disney and John Deere. *We certainly do NOT have to pay highly satisfied people to make referrals, we need to ask, remind, and thank them for doing so.*

**If you have heard of *Indian Dream Catchers*, think of your website as an *Indian Lead Catcher*.** If you do the right things there, you will IMMEDIATELY have more leads. Immediately. Why? Because of WOM, you are already getting leads who end up on your not-so-hot website ... who then hit the exit button.

*Bye-bye lead.*

**For denominational schools, often the most productive marketing is to your own churches.** In our research with SDA homeschoolers in California, money was not the reason they would not attend their SDA school. *Instead, homeschoolers felt they could do Christian and Adventist better than their own denomination's school!* A word to the wise is sufficient; in both parental satisfaction and increased enrollment, discipleship is the clear winner over noble but misguided attempts at evangelism.

**Healthy Tuition and Reasonable Financial aid is actually your #1 priority above.** The simple reason is that bad finance causes programmatic cuts and compromises that diminish QUALITY, the core strength of any Christian school. *In your parents' minds, if you lack quality, it does not matter how cheap you are. You are not worth it at any price!*

It is such a simple thing to drop tuition off the website and talk about financial aid instead. *Present a lump sum amount only –*

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# Top Ten Ways to Decrease Enrollment

*Jewel Speyer, Recruiter, Loma Linda Academy*

Everyone who works at a school has asked at some point, “How can we get more students?” Our experiences at Loma Linda Academy have helped us to discover what *not* to do. Therefore, we have outlined a list of common mistakes that can hinder enrollment. We hope this article encourages your school to make changes that will create more opportunities for those looking for quality Adventist education.

**Focus on fancy ads, not happy families.** Ask yourself, are your students actually smiling as much as they are on the billboard? Remember, happy students, happy parents. Nothing sells your school as much as positive *word of mouth*.

**Assume all SDA families will automatically choose your school.** With Millennials spending hours reading reviews on Amazon, you can bet they are researching local schools before choosing a place to invest in their child’s education and future. Attendance at a specific church does not guarantee school enrollment. In order to recruit from SDA churches, you need to build relationships, create an irresistible community, and listen to their needs.

**Ignore your niche; trumpet how your school is like every other school.** Answer the question; what sets you apart from other schools in your community?

**Pile all marketing and recruitment responsibilities on your principal.** Be honest, your principal is busy. Although he or she will want to meet prospective students, having someone dedicated to recruitment that can follow through with families

from start to finish, will likely return big dividends.

**Relax. Someone else will follow up with prospective families.** Who will? Have a system in place to follow up on prospective families. Ideally, someone should call them within 48 hours, and a record of continued follow-up is essential.

**Do more talking than listening to parents’ needs.** Often we assume that parents want to be sold on our school, when in reality, they want a need met for their child, and we can best provide for them by first *listening*.

**Keep your school separate from your community.** Focus on integration not isolation. Interact with local churches, schools, and preschools. Let your neighbors, public safety officials, local businesses, and media know who you are.

**Allow your website to be outdated, confusing, and dull.** For many families, they begin their search for a school online. Your website is often their first impression of your school. If it does not impress them, they may not inquire further.

**Present your school as an exclusive institution.** Do not treat your school like a country club with membership, but instead as a mission field. Our schools have so much to offer families in the community who desire a private school and Christian education and it would be a shame for them to miss out due to feelings of inadequacy or belonging. Be careful not to underestimate your value.

**Sell Christian education as a luxury, not an investment.** We understand Christian education is not cheap, but we believe each child’s future is the most valuable investment a parent could make. (jspeyer@lla.org) ☪

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*no other numbers.* For financial aid, the first step is an ESC with the principal, period.

For jaded board members, *please note that the key financial aid metric here is not how much you give away, but how much you keep. That is, do you have more tuition revenue – cold hard cash – than you did before?* Far too many of us have empty seats that need partially paid students, even on unfunded financial aid, *because these families would at least pay half of their child’s tuition. Especially for lower income families, we ARE the best hope for that child’s future!*

**Quality Program is the #2 priority.** From about 600 Christian school satisfaction surveys, we know that *the best thing teachers can do for marketing is be great teachers; they are well over half of parents’ satisfaction equation. In our experience, you cannot emphasize Christian too much, even on the coasts. Academics is a close second, EVERYTHING ELSE is far distant, including technology, test scores, and extra-curriculars.*

**Retention is the #3 priority.** *It is far easier to keep your current students than recruit new ones.* Which means, hold a fantastic spring open house just for your own CURRENT

*parents.* Escalate your re-enrollment fees so you can identify who is “on the fence” – and work with them – *while their kids are still in school.* And if they tell you they are not coming back for financial reasons, ask them: “If we could work this out financially, would you come back?” *If the answer is ambiguous or no, ask them what else is holding them back.* Do not immediately gush forth on your financial aid program – **find out what is really going on.**

**Closing and generating more leads are therefore #4 and #5.** Facebook is half as important as getting your website right. Having a way to send periodic emails to prospects is also twice as important as Facebook.

**And Branding is in a class of its own.** If you get branding right, then none of the rest (save finance) really matters. However, focused on “communicating better”, “trying harder” or the minutiae of their program, most Christian schools never truly differentiate themselves. Which is why we as consultants spend a significant amount of time on all the mechanics above.

*GraceWorks Ministries was founded in 2000 and has worked exclusively with K-12 schools for 10 years. Dan Krause can be reached at dan@gwmin.com or (719)278-9600, ext. 100. ☪*