



March 2007

Catholic School Enrollment Talk

ISPD is your Catholic School Enrollment Solution for maintaining and/or increasing the quantity, quality, or diversity of your elementary or secondary Catholic school enrollment.

"Free Publicity for Your School"

By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist

Some of you have heard the story of how I got started in enrollment management. I was hired at a small, Catholic college as the director of admissions/registrar/student services/academic advisor/career counselor/campus minister. Yes, a lot of hats to wear, but obviously recruiting and retaining students were of primary importance.

To my surprise, I learned that I had all of \$800 to market the college. Prior to my arrival, enrollment had hit an all time low and the President told us that we needed to increase enrollment quickly or the Board might decide to close the college. I am sure this sounds familiar to some of you who are facing similar challenges.

To make matters worse, you could stop at the local gas station and ask the clerk where the college was located and more often than not they would tell you that they had never heard of the college. **What our Catholic college had on its side was a great story.** I hear those same compelling stories of faith, hope, and love told in elementary and secondary Catholic schools across the country.

But, how on \$800 were we going to be able to effectively communicate the power of our college's educational experience? The answer was to take our case to the media. To do this most effectively, we formed a "news bureau." Since we were in the enrollment management emergency room, we met first thing every Monday morning. Six of us representing various areas of the college brainstormed newsworthy angles. We divided up the stories we wanted to cover. We sent out short releases as well as lengthier feature stories. The success of our effort was immediately evident. It was typical to pick up an edition of one of the many local community newspapers within our college's target market and read 4 or 5 articles about the college.

The bottom line is that the college's enrollment grew. There were many reasons for this growth, but the increased media coverage the college received created a new, dynamic awareness that was needed to support the other efforts that

we were making.

One of the things ISPD teaches schools in its enrollment management seminars and consults is how to launch a school news bureau. For some time now, I have been following the marketing work of Marcia Yudkin. The following suggestions relating to increasing media coverage in Catholic schools are distilled from her book *6 Steps to Free Publicity*.

- **The starting point for your school's news bureau is determining your goals for media coverage.** Yudkin helps you to set your goals by asking the following 6 questions:
 1. Which of the following do you want most - credibility and prestige, new students, or changed or opened minds?
 2. Where geographically, does it make sense for you to aim?
 3. Who, specifically, are you hoping to reach? Prospective students/parents, current students/parents, alumni, etc.?
 4. Are you hoping to sell a particular concept, idea, or service? Quality education, religious instruction, faith-based values, caring community, safety and security, service, etc.?
 5. Will you welcome any and all publicity opportunities, or will you want to pick and choose among opportunities to maintain a certain image and focus?
 6. Do you have a reason to lean more to one medium than another? If you are attempting to reach both parents and children, will one medium work for both or do you need to use different mediums?

- **When sharing particularly good news, the media can be difficult to reach and connect with for stories.** Yudkin offers the following key angles to unlock media doors:
 1. Focus on something new in the school.
 2. Focus on what is different or distinctive about your school.
 3. Create events to publicize.
 4. Tie your school's publicity into current news.
 5. Has a faculty member or student done any research that could merit coverage?
 6. Are there any interesting contests or awards that could be sponsored?
 7. Could the press release be tied into a holiday or anniversary?
 8. What trends in the general population or some particular population does your school relate to?
 9. Is there a surprising twist that your school could put on an idea, person, place, or thing?
 10. Is there any humor that your school could put on a press release topic?

- **Once you have your news bureau motivated and focusing on newsworthy stories, you need to give them a format for submitting the information to the point person who will polish it up and send it out.** In her book, Yudkin offers the following format that news people like:

1. Find a news angle for your headline. Just as in newspaper headlines, you can use a compressed, telegraphic style.
2. Present the basic facts for the angle of your headline in paragraph one. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
3. Gather or create a lively quote that elaborates on the basic facts for paragraph two.
4. Elaborate further on basic facts in paragraph three.
5. End with the nitty-gritty details.
6. Send it off.

- [Visit www.Yudkin.com to learn more about Marcia Yudkin's work or to purchase her book on free publicity.](http://www.Yudkin.com)

In the News

I recently shared ISPD's enrollment management program with a gathering of principals and school board members in the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois. The following article from the Catholic Explorer highlights this event. Let us know if you would like to sponsor an ISPD Catholic school enrollment management program at your school or in your diocese.

- [3/23/07 Article on "Securing the Future of our Catholic Schools"](#)

A Catholic School Web Site to Watch

St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati, Ohio
www.StXavier.org

I could not go very long without highlighting the Admissions Department web pages of St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati. There are many things that I like about these web pages. However, I would like to direct you in particular to the link for tuition and financial aid. Look at how much good information the school provides about financial assistance. Many Catholic schools are losing prospective students right now because parents are being asked to wait too long to know what kind of tuition assistance they are eligible to receive. No one would ever purchase a car without first knowing how they are going to pay for it. Given the process of applying for financial assistance in Catholic schools, we are often asking families to register weeks before we get back with them with a tuition assistance award. There are better ways of doing this. Take a look at how much up front information about tuition assistance that St. Xavier High School provides on its web site.

- [Click here to visit St. Xavier High School's Admissions Pages](#)

Spiritual Thought

As Catholic educators we are part of a tradition that encourages on-going conversion. Our Lenten journey challenges us that if we do what we have always done, we will

get what we have always gotten. The enrollment challenges we face in our schools are an invitation by the Holy Spirit to change. Theologian Dennis Edwards calls this working of the Spirit negative grace.

I like to view the Holy Spirit in the context of a road that I am driving down. The stripes on the road are the Spirit's way of telling me whether or not I am heading in the right direction. Sometimes I fail to pay close enough attention and I begin to go outside the stripes. When I do so I begin to hit the rumble strips on the side of the road. These rumble strips are the Spirit's way of telling me that I have really gotten off course. If I fail to heed these warning signs of the Spirit, then I am going to end up going off the road and wrecking my car.

We all understand and relate to positive grace. It is more difficult to respond to negative grace. Whether your school is up or down with its enrollment, there are important challenges that must be addressed as a Church community. In the end we are all one Church. When a school closes due to low enrollment, we all suffer.

During this season of Lent focus some of your prayer life on the enrollment challenges we face in our schools. Ask the Spirit for guidance. Commit to do something different regarding your school's enrollment. And above all else, focus on the transforming power of the Resurrection.

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TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Catholic School Enrollment Solutions - Strategies That Deliver Immediate Results
- Best First Steps to Take in Beginning Your Catholic Development Efforts
- "Show Me the Money!" - Capital Campaigns That Produce Results
- Charge Up Your Development Battery!
- Catholic School Enrollment Solutions - Strategies for Catholic School Enrollment Growth

ISPD Also Conducts On-Site Workshops

Offered to Catholic schools and parishes within a single diocese, these workshops are designed to meet your specific needs.

- [Check Here for More Information on ISPD Development Training Workshops](#)

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