



INSTITUTE OF SCHOOL & PARISH DEVELOPMENT

*Bringing People, Process, and Ministry Together to Build the
Kingdom of God.*

February 2011

Enrollment Talk

Is Your Catholic School's Website a 24/7 Marketing Tool or Simply an Information Warehouse?

By

John Cooper, Enrollment Management Specialist

Your school's website exists for the main purpose of promoting your school on the internet. The website should not only be used as a "warehouse" of information for current students and families, but a marketing tool for "prospects". I realize I may have just pushed a panic button for many of you. You may ask: "How will the website appeal to current students and families as well as prospects?"

Important information for current students and parents should be funneled through a portal. A portal should do essentially two things for your current students and parents. It provides a means of logging-in to password protected information, and it provides limited, focused content for your current school families. There are more elaborate portals that will allow you to select and organize the information you wish to access on a regular basis. Due to the ever growing demand, the price for a portal has become more affordable for a Catholic school.

Once you have portals set up for your current students and families, your website can become one of your school's greatest marketing tools for "prospects". Remember that your website is like an online storybook. It is leading the visitor from point A to point B. At point A it is best to assume that the visitor knows nothing at all about your school. It is even probably better to assume that the visitor isn't really that interested in your school. He/she is just checking out all the options available to them for elementary or high school in the area. With this in mind, what can your website do to compel the visitor to move to point B (enrollment)? Here are my top 3 things your website must do to move visitors to take that next step.

1. Content: Direct the content of your website to the prospective student/family.
Underneath the Prospective Students/Families Section should include the following types of pages...
 - Welcome – We Want You to be Part of Our School Community
 - Inquire On-line form
 - Who we are - Explain the make-up of your student/family community. Give the visitor a glimpse into how big or small your school is. Where do students attend prior to attending your school?
 - Benefits – As a member of our School Community you receive . . . use data from test scores in easy to read graphs. If your test scores don't fully represent the benefits enjoyed at your school, then make the case in other ways. However, know that you must make a case, one way or another.
 - Admissions Next Steps – Explain in the simplest possible way the steps to admission/enrollment in your school. Don't assume that your site visitors know these steps. Take them from this page to an apply for admission on-line form.
 - Financing Tuition – Explain in as simple a way as possible all the options for financing education at your school. Link up the visitor with an online financial assistance form.
 - Student Page – Ask student's questions about their school and put the answers on this web page. Their responses will "warm up" the site.
 - Parent to Parent Page – Ask a couple of parents to dialogue about their experience. This can be done using text or video. Provide selected parent emails so that prospects can interact with them.
 - Faculty Page – Ask a couple of faculty to respond to student/parent questions about academic life in the classroom. This can be done using text or video. Provide links to each faculty member's classroom web page.
 - Register On-line
2. Navigation: Your website is your school's online house. People construct houses with a limited number of front doors because they don't want to confuse the visitor about which door to enter. The majority of Catholic school websites have too many "front doors" (homepage links) from which to delve more deeply into the site.

Go to this St. Example School website to view how to organize a site for ease of navigation - <http://kinkeadridge.com/examples/school.htm>. The "stickiness" (average time spent per visit on your website) depends largely on the site's ease of navigation. Visitors to your website tend to leave when they become anxious over not finding what they are looking for during the visit. In designing your websites navigation, you have to think like a prospect who has never visited your site. The navigation of your website should be laid out in much the same way as the table of contents in a magazine.

3. Interactivity: Starting with the basics, write website content in an interactive manner e.g. click here to view St. Example School's standardized test scores. Include prompts to take action like inquire online, let us know you are interested, etc... throughout the site. Placing You Tube video on the website is cost free way of adding to the experience. Setting up an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed allows visitors to subscribe to your

website news feeds. Identify school parent bloggers who you can trust to share their stories. You can even purchase specialized website software (at affordable prices) to help make your site more interactive. Check out SiteJazzer Desktop at <http://sitejazzzer.com/desktop/product-overview.html>.

All of this is a Waste of Time, if you don't regularly analyze the Traffic to Your Website!

Some things are still free in this world. Google Analytics is one of them. It is a free service that shows you how people found your site, how they explored the site, and how you can enhance their visitor experience. A website is a continuous work in progress so treat it that way. Make changes to the content, navigation and interactivity of your website and then regularly measure your visitors experience through Google Analytics. Begin monitoring the successes of your website marketing today by visiting <http://www.google.com/support/analytics/bin/topic.py?topic=10957>.

Increase the Success of Your Online Campaigns by sending Video Email

Increase the open and click through rates for your email campaigns by embedding video. People are responding very positively to video in emails. With this in mind, think about short, topical videos you could create to market your school. How about an email campaign featuring a video of a husband and wife sharing why they choose to send their child to your Catholic elementary school? How about an email campaign to high school prospects that features a message from an alum of your school who has earned a large college scholarship? How about emailing a welcoming video from faculty and staff? How about a video about financial aid? The list goes on and on.

Spiritual Thought

Our prayers are with you as you enter this stressful time of the recruitment season when the focus on numbers grows greater and greater by the day. A long time ago the Ursuline Sisters taught me to never underestimate the power of the "Holy Spirit Factor" in keeping a Catholic school alive. May the force of the Spirit be with you and your school in the coming days, weeks and months. Amen.