

Developing an Aggressive Marketing Program

The purpose of this project was to create an aggressive marketing program that reflected our passion and zeal for Christian education and the vision and mission of Redeemer Christian School. Previous years' shot-gun marketing efforts at Redeemer Christian School had been ineffective and yielded little result. Money was budgeted but not spent, for fear of "wasting" resources on projects that would not provide increases in revenue or enrollment. Our school was in dire need of a comprehensive marketing program based upon best practices.

A committee of parents (promoters) staff and the principal evaluated marketing efforts of the school within our community and found them to be inadequate. Based upon best practices and the particular distinctives of RCS, a schedule of marketing activities during the school year was developed. Other aspects of the school marketing program included: a customer service policy for employees, development of an administrative calendar delegating clerical and office tasks to designated staff personnel, staff job descriptions were modified to include their participation in marketing efforts for the school, school website was improved, school communications to constituency were improved, and facilities were significantly enhanced. The marketing calendar will be implemented in the fall of 2009.

Denise Monroe, Ed.D.
Redeemer Christian School
Mesa, AZ 85203

Developing an Aggressive Marketing Program

Redeemer Christian School is a classical, Christian school located in Mesa, Arizona, and is sponsored by Church of the Redeemer, a reformed, evangelical fellowship, also in Mesa. Although the school was founded in 1980 and serves students K through 12, current enrollment is 70 students. For many years, the school's marketing approach was not planned or coordinated, and varied promotion efforts were made as opportunities for school exposure arose. For most years, money was budgeted but not spent, for fear of "wasting" resources on projects that would not provide increases in revenue or enrollment. Previous marketing efforts yielded little or no measurable results. In a small school, such as RCS, enrollment increases from marketing efforts make a huge impact in operating funds. The purpose of this project was to create an aggressive marketing program that reflected our passion and zeal for Christian education and the vision and mission of Redeemer Christian School.

Recent research from the Goldwater Institute in 2008 revealed that even though 31% of Arizonans professed regular church attendance and Christian profession of faith, only 7% of Arizonans enrolled their children in Christian schools. It has been observed that local charter schools compete with private schools for enrollment. As charter schools flourish in the Phoenix area, private school enrollment is jeopardized. An additionally disturbing complication that has been observed by the RCS Board and RCS parents is the nominal support from area church leaders to encourage church members to raise their children in Christian schools.

In the fall of 2008, under the direction of the RCS Board, a committee was formed of parents/staff who had experience or vision for marketing the school (parent

promoters, entrepreneurs, businessmen, teachers, principal.) The group evaluated the effectiveness of the website, school communications, office procedures in serving parents and visitors, principal's availability to be a presence in the community, attractiveness and maintenance of the facilities, and a review of previous marketing efforts of the school (brochures, ads, presence and exposure in the community and in churches represented in the school.) Members of the committee were frustrated at the school's conservative marketing approach.

A report of preliminary recommendations based upon the observations of the marketing committee was presented to the School Board. The principal researched the following resources: Collin's Good to Great, Blanchard and Miller's The Secret, Spector and McCarthy's The Nordstrom Way to Customer Service Excellence, and Krause and Rogalski's Marketing Christian Schools: The Definitive Guide. Additionally, the RCS Board benefited from studying a presentation from Cherry & Co., "Rebranding and Marketing the Christian School."

The RCS Board designated \$1500 to be available for the marketing committee's projects. Marketing efforts began immediately: an ad in a back-to-school issue of a valley-wide magazine for young families, articles published biweekly in school sections of area neighborhood newspapers, a revamping of the website, letters and enrollment materials sent to area preschools, and tuition incentives for current families who recruit new families to the school.

A review of the website revealed that our school's URL was not published to the web as efficiently as it needed to be, thus limiting our web exposure. Information retrieved from the website was limited, according to committee members, and the website

needed to be ‘freshened up’ and more appealing to young families. An overhaul of the school’s website is underway.

The committee also recommended applying marketing aspects to other programs of the school: promoting the school in fundraisers, at school performances, during summer camp activities, and promoting the school during school outreach programs that are geared toward homeschoolers. An annual marketing calendar was developed by the principal as suggested by Krause and Rogalski for implementation in Fall 2009.

Contact with alumni, past donors and supporters of the school, and churches needed to be developed by the school. It was a goal that the principal be freed from clerical office administration tasks to focus on marketing efforts that only she can do. An annual weekly administrative calendar was developed, which outlined a mini-timeline for each activity of the school, with tasks delegated to appropriate office and administrative personnel. Alumni and donor lists were amassed. A template from our school communiqué, *From the Ram’s Horn*, was updated.

Principles of effective customer service and practices which reflect joyful service to the glory of God were outlined in school policy for all school staff, and included elements of serving current and prospective families with personable effectiveness. These principles were added to the faculty/staff handbook and were written as expectations in job descriptions. School communications and information to current and future families, and staff will be reviewed regarding its kind and inviting tone and joyful service. School staff job descriptions were also revised to include an element of marketing to new families: expectations to phone or meet with prospective parents, personal attention to help orient new families, etc.

Church of the Redeemer had begun capital improvements on the worship center and fellowship hall in spring 2009, and had updated church landscaping. The principal introduced the “Open House Every Day” mindset for the school, and challenged faculty and staff to be ready for current and prospective parents with clean, organized, and de-cluttered classrooms and offices. Some faculty and board members voluntarily began the makeover of 30-year facilities in June, even when money was not available. The science lab was reorganized and painted, and purged of old materials no longer used; the art room was painted and reorganized to maximize space and student productivity, the library was gleaned of books that were sorely out-of-date. In July, plans are to reorganize and paint the library, as well as computer and school aftercare rooms.

In order to serve all children of Christian families, the Board initiated a program for Christian special education to begin in the fall of 2009 at RCS. The goal of this program is to expand the classical Christian curriculum to students with special education needs.

While directing changes in customer service expectations with the office staff, the principal began to realize how much time she spent in ‘damage control,’ and in thwarting parents’ frustration when being served at the school. What methods/ tasks/attitudes the principal thought were commonly known and sensible ways of helping serve families were foreign to some on the staff. For those staff members, the policy and procedure was a practical way to making those methods explicit and expected as part of our school culture.

As the principal completed the administrative calendar, she learned that she was handling a majority of office and clerical tasks that were delegated to administrative staff

but not completed. Time demands from clerical tasks limited the principal's engagement in marketing efforts.

While there were no marked enrollment increases to date, a developed marketing plan based upon best practices has positively transformed many aspects of our school: administrative organization, board leadership, spirit of service excellence among our staff, freedom of principal's time to pursue marketing opportunities, facilities improvement, openness to new programs that will increase enrollment, revitalized alumni and donor databases. As the annual marketing calendar is implemented this next school year, I anticipate the synergy of campus efforts to be productive and effective. Due to increased exposure, name recognition, parent satisfaction, and positive reputation, etc, fundraising and enrollment are likely to increase. All programs and events sponsored by the school can be used in a way to market the school positively. Marketing is not just one person's responsibility, but all in the organization contribute to its success.