Jason W. Powell, Head of The Christ School

Implementation of Marketing Task Force Recommendations

The emphasis of the school-based project for the Van Lunen Program focused on implementing the recommendations of a marketing task force of The Christ School (TCS). The two key outcomes of the project were: 1) The school's first comprehensive marketing plan and 2) A reorganized advancement division including the addition of a marketing and communication specialist. Through this process, lessons were learned regarding the impact of reorganization on employees. It was also learned that reorganization is an on-going process that develops over time more so than simply implementing new positions and job descriptions. This project has made a difference in the school community by providing clarity and focus for the employees of the advancement division. The marketing efforts of the school have been more strategically planned and implemented with the addition of the marketing and communication specialist.

School Background

The Christ School is an independent Christian School serving students in kindergarten through 8th grade (K-8). The school's mission is to partner with families to provide an academically rigorous and Christ-centered K-8 experience. Students and graduates confidently pursue excellence in scholarship, service and leadership. The Christ School is fully accredited by Christian Schools of Florida and continues to grow academically and exceed educational standards. Graduates of The Christ School are prepared to perform with distinction at the next academic level; are equipped and motivated to become life-long learners; are committed to being others-oriented; are confident and articulate in communication and are devoted to glorifying God.

The school is in its 18th year of operation and currently serves 330 students. Enrollment has grown slightly for the past few years following a significant decline during the 2008-2010 school years. The highest enrollment prior to the decline was 407 students. During the 2012-13 school year, a task force was assembled to study and make recommendations on how to improve the marketing efforts of the school.

Timeline

The task force provided a report to the head of school during the summer of 2013. The reorganization began during the fall of 2013-14 and is on-going. The comprehensive marketing plan was presented to the head of school in June 2014 and implementation has begun.

Marketing Plan Overview

Areas of focus within the plan include: 1) Brand Marketing/Awareness, 2) Recruitment, 3) Retention and 4) Positioning the school as an academic leader. The primary goal is to raise awareness of TCS and motivate prospective families to engage with TCS with the result of increasing enrollment of mission appropriate students.

The plan also includes activities to increase retention of current students by establishing The Christ School as an academic leader; reiterating the academically-rigorous and Christ-centered curriculum, and explicitly communicating how students exemplify the Portrait of The Christ School graduate.

Brand Marketing

The brand marketing goals for the school include: 1) Increase awareness of The Christ School, 2) Position The Christ School as a leader in academic excellence in the Central Florida

region, 3) Position The Christ School as a leader in providing an education with a Christ-centered focus, 4) Educate the public about the academics and quality of teachers and 5) Educate the public about the quality of our students and graduates, instilled with educational, leadership, life skills and Christian values.

Marketing Strategies:

- advertising through print (magazine, newspapers, playbills, etc.), radio, television, Google adwords and e-mail,
- event participation throughout the greater Orlando area (student performances, parades, holiday celebrations, etc.),
- press releases, editorial coverage and speaking engagements,
- sponsorships/partnerships with external organizations including preschool fairs, sports leagues, church events, concerts, road races, city government, chambers of commerce
- website upgrades for 2014-15 with a 20th anniversary focus for 2015-16,
- increased social media, primarily Facebook and Twitter,
- banners and campus signage,
- collateral, promotional items (car magnets, yard signs, videos) and use of targeted direct mailings,
- outreach to local church leaders,
- on-going constituent communication (weekly e-mail, Lions' Pride Newsletter, parent ambassadors, etc.)

Reorganization of Advancement Division

The marketing task force report included a recommendation for increased staffing and realignment of positions of the school's advancement division. The key areas of focus included: development, external marketing, internal marketing and administrative support.

Following the receipt of the report, the head of school spent several weeks considering the recommendations. This included many discussions with current advancement personnel, school leadership team members, trustees, peer heads of schools and the Van Lunen project consultant. A lesson learned during the reorganization involved the importance of communicating as much as possible with staff impacted. This discernment period was difficult for the staff involved because of the uncertainty related to the impact on their roles.

Following the discernment period, the decision was made to establish the following positions for the advancement division: director of advancement (to oversee the entire division and implement development activities), admission director, marketing and communications specialist and advancement coordinator. This step involved revising the job descriptions and explaining the roles to the impacted team members. Implementing the plan required additional funding that was provided following a presentation to the board of trustees. The plan was approved in October 2013 and the position of marketing and communication specialist was advertised in November. The position was filled and the new employee began in late January 2014. During the fall and winter, challenges were encountered related to the impact of the reorganization on current staff. This was particularly challenging for the admission director who no longer reported to the head of school and began reporting to the director of advancement.

The next step of the advancement reorganization involved the induction of the new marketing and communication specialist. The employee began in the role in late January. Because the employee was also a first-year parent at the school, the employee had some familiarity with the organization. Just as well, the employee's professional marketing experience was within the arts sector. It required a few months of experience for the specialist to gain a

better understanding of how independent private schools are operated and presented in the marketplace.

While the marketing and communication specialist was in place and learning the new role and environment, the advancement division staff continued to experience challenges related to the new organizational structure. The challenges culminated with the resignation of the admission director, a key employee for the past 5 years. The primary reason the admission director provided for the resignation was the new management structure that involved the director of advancement overseeing all aspects of the advancement division, including the admission area. It was the professional opinion of the admission director that the new organizational structure created unnecessary redundancies and inefficiencies.

The resignation of the admission director led the head of school to evaluate the effectiveness of the new organizational model. Following observations and conversations with advancement staff, it was determined that another phase of reorganization was in order. The next phase involved the elimination of the director of advancement position and reassignment of roles and responsibilities. The structure provides for three full-time employees for the near future instead of four. Both the director of admission and the development specialist will report directly to the head of school and the marketing and communication specialist will report to the director of admission. This model will be evaluated for 6-months and a determination will be made regarding future staffing needs. This revised model will be presented to the board of trustees at the end of June 2014.