

School Promotion Project for Quinte Christian High School  
Word of Mouth Campaign  
Website and Social Media

John VanderWindt, Principal  
Quinte Christian High School,  
Belleville, Ontario

Consultant  
Jim McKenzie

The apostle Paul begins his letter to the Philippians writing, “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:3-6). These verses typify my experience with the Van Lunen Fellowship program, as it has been the best Christian professional development I have received since becoming a teacher, and has become an incredible resource for being in a leadership position as the principal of Quinte Christian High School in Belleville, Ontario. Having spent time within the fellowship gaining knowledge about the many areas which a head of a school needs in order for a school to flourish, it has been a blessing to be able to choose a project centered on the needs of this school, while being given the resources to make these improvements. Thus, this report is a summary of gratitude for the partnership and the project being implemented at Quinte Christian High School.

Being a small school, as principal/COO there are a number of areas for which I am responsible, and not many other people to help make things happen. This project through the Van Lunen Fellowship allowed for resources not typically available, which is very valuable for achieving success at the highest levels. Thus, I spent much time thinking about needed areas of growth in order to choose wisely a culminating project which would best benefit the school; a number of ideas came to mind. Currently, we create a budget every spring for the following year, based on an estimate of the number of students we think will attend, and these numbers always change during the summer. We understand that we need to have better record keeping and dashboards in order to create more accurate budgets, and also to be able to create three-year budgets and thus have some stabilization and clear understanding for parents who are also trying to plan for the cost of education. The establishment of this is essential for our school, so creating a strategic budgeting and finance plan for the school would make for a good project.

However, another area which is very important for Christian education is ensuring that everything is taught through the lens of Christian perspective. This is currently being accomplished in most classes, but some teachers' philosophy remains teaching their subject and then adding Christian frosting on the top. To truly teach from a Christian perspective, one must begin with one's faith—teachers have to teach their faith, adding the subject matter to their faith. Thus, one curriculum shift needed at our school is to incorporate teaching for transformation, so that all subjects are taught based on faith, rather than having some Christianese thrown on top, because it is a Christian school. Thus, this change in intentional faith is another necessary change which needs to happen, especially for some staff members, and the resources from Van Lunen on culture, and changing culture in a school, would help to make this another good choice for a project.

Surprisingly, promotion is another need in our school community. Being a small school in a small rural community, one would think that most people would be aware of the school and what it has to offer. Unfortunately this is not the case. A few years ago, we had a parent at our open house whose last child was going into the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. She was a member of a supporting church and knew the school existed, but had never been inside until that evening. As we were talking she said, "I always wondered what was behind the doors of Quinte Christian High School." This was an incredible reminder of the need to get people in the school, as well as a punch in the gut realizing we were not doing a good job of promotion within the greater community. This, along with a survey of our school parents a couple of years ago, revealed that we do not do a good job of talking positively about our school with people outside of the school community. With little parental promotion, and demographics showing few potential students in the next four years, doing a project on promotion would also be incredibly valuable for the school.

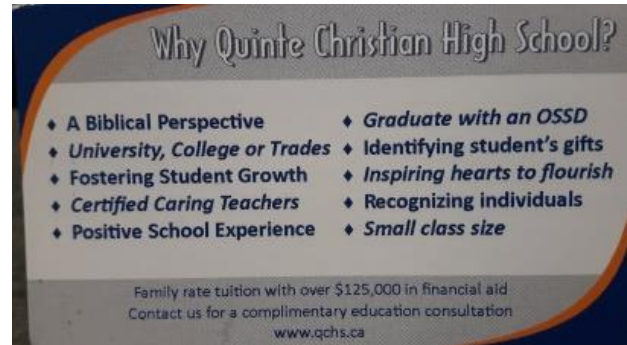
A strategic budgeting and finance plan, teaching for transformation, and school promotion—these were all viable project options. After much thought, I determined that the first two options needed

to occur, and would be implemented in combination with the board; it was the third option of school promotion which was most critical at this time. Choosing this project on promotion would give accountability to an often overlooked area, but would also help with some of the budgeting issues as there are simply less students in our usual demographic for the next few years. Promotion for this project would be geared toward three areas—a “word of mouth” campaign, and evaluation of both our website and social media presence—all three areas which Van Lunen had many resources to share with our school.

When Jim McKenzie first presented the concept of a “word of mouth” campaign, I knew this was something we needed to instill within our school. As the previously-mentioned survey showed, although parents are pleased with the school, and often speak to each other or the staff about how blessed they are to have their children attend Quinte Christian, we don’t have a reputation for speaking highly about the school to people not connected with the school, even though most parents are connected with a wide circle of other parents who would benefit from having their son or daughter attend Quinte Christian High School.

The board agreed that this would be a positive plan for the school to implement, so we connected with Jim and began looking at various options—having him travel to Quinte Christian, myself and a board member visiting him, or a phone or skype conversation. After consultation with Jim, we decided on a skype interview, which, due to internet issues, turned into a phone interview. This was a valuable time in which Jim explained the process of initiating a word of mouth campaign for our school. One of the key items to begin the process was hosting a promoter’s reception, and Jim gave many helpful ideas for organizing this event. Within the conversation, we also discussed hosting each spring a special re-enrollment night for current parents, which the board will implement beginning next year.

The first step in our plan was to create business cards, which people would receive at the promoter's reception as a resource to hand out to their friends as they conversed about Quinte Christian. This is what we developed, based on a sample which Jim sent to us:



With help from the members of the promotion committee of the board, we hosted a promoter's reception evening. At Jim's suggestion, we targeted people who were outspokenly positive about the school, and sent them a personal invitation to the evening. We sent out invitations to about 150 people, most of them couples, and about 35 people attended our promoter's reception. Since this was a new concept for all of us, one of the things we learned from this experience was the need to explain our expectations for the evening and for the participants more clearly before the event. We are anticipating a better response as we host our second reception in the fall.

We began the evening with devotional singing and scripture in recognition that this school belongs to God and we rely on his leading and provision. The vision, mission and core values of the school were reviewed after we participated in some ice breaker games—sharing an event which occurred in the year on the nickel each person received at their table, and also a speed-question circle, where each person in the inner circle and the outer circle, had thirty seconds to answer a question before the circle rotated one person to the right to begin again with another question. Then the concept of a word of mouth campaign was introduced to the guests—who were enjoying homemade desserts—sharing about how whenever we need something, we ask people we know and trust where they have acquired the item or where they would go for whatever we are looking for. School is just like that, most

parents talk to people they know about where their children go to school and use that as a primary source in their decision of which school to send their children. We also talked about how easy it was to share a story about the year on the nickel, or answer a question in the circle.

We then continued the discussion, talking about how to look for opportunities to share about Quinte Christian, such as when parents are dissatisfied with their child's current school. We also discussed how to deal with conversation killers, such as the cost of tuition, learning how to respond to these types of questions. We ended with the key portion of the campaign, how to acquire permission from the prospective family for the school to contact them. This is a vital step as hopefully this new contact would lead to a school visit, and a better understanding of what Quinte Christian could offer their child.

As the guests left we gave them packets of the business cards we had created and took time to debrief with a few of them to see how to improve the evening. The attendees were thrilled with the evening, and appreciated receiving creative ways to talk to fellow parents; they felt the pressure had been relieved as they didn't have to convince their friends or justify the tuition, but rather just introduce the idea and encourage them to be contacted. Since the reception, the school has received some new inquiries, but since this was only the first reception, we think the response from the greater community will only increase with time.

The other area for our project on school promotion was an evaluation of both our website and social media presence. We have a functioning website, but it is old and needs to be revitalized. I have been working with our IT person on creating a new site, but that has not yet been completed. We have assigned more IT time for next year and therefore we are expecting some changes to happen in the fall. Some of these changes will also include creating a much more active Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram accounts. We are also going to revamp our website so that there is a public and a parent

portion. Jim McKenzie has given us a number of ideas for this and has agreed to be a sounding board as we continue in the fall.

School promotion is an ongoing process. We have begun this year with the promoter's reception and received positive feedback and a few inquiries already. Making promotion an accountable part of the work of the board and myself has been a positive experience for the school, and creating a group of supporters who are excited to receive methods and tools to support Quinte Christian has had a positive impact on our school community. I am excited to continue the process next year, to see what God has envisioned for our school, and I continue to thank God every time I remember my moments at Van Lunen and how the fellowship is helping to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ, one school at a time.