

## **Integrated Marketing Strategies for SCS**

Without question, this project became a study that could have been titled, "I really don't know what I don't know!" I spent easily five months working on traditional marketing techniques which basically appeal to Baby Boomers – I did this because I am a Baby Boomer and we tend to think that everyone else thinks like us. However, In January/February of this year (following a large amount of reading regarding Millennials) I became far more aware of the Millennial group we are now working with in our schools and I (too) slowly realized that while aspects of a traditional marketing strategy still work in our schools, I had been missing an essential element of a complete marketing strategy.

Traditional marketing tactics such as advertising, referrals and public relations are still very important, but social media tactics have now become a part of everyday marketing's fabric and need to be considered at the strategic level of the SCS marketing process (today 65% of adult Internet users use a social networking site like Facebook or LinkedIn). The way people share information is changing the way we communicate with our target audiences. Whether we are recruiting new families or staff or connecting with existing families and students, social networks must be brought into the mix – but it cannot stand apart from our overall marketing and communication strategies.

"Both Baby Boomers and Millennials value personal connection. However, Millennials use technology to connect with a greater number of people, more frequently, and in real time. Millennials use social media platforms more than non-Millennials (79% versus 59%), and they maintain significantly larger networks: 46% have 200 or more "friends" on Facebook compared with 19% of non-Millennials." ("The Millennial Consumer", BCG, April 2012, pg 6)

What was missing to make the marketing package complete was 'Social Media Marketing' – I became very aware of the importance of this with Millennials and their children following all my research and reading. Social media has the potential to attract and hold the attention of a vast demographic of people, especially those who are numb to traditional marketing techniques. Social media is the use of technology to co-create, know, like and trust. It is also clear that what you put into social media and social networking is directly proportional to what you will get out of it. It takes serious time and energy to be done properly.

So what slows 'old guys' like me from getting started? Two basic things:

1. The learning curve to get up to speed on social media techniques and platforms.
2. The time it takes to learn it, implement it and see the value it delivers to SCS.

While there is no guaranteed formula for successful cross-media advertising, there are best practices, processes and emerging knowledge that can help leverage success. The more we, as marketers, truly understand our Millennial segment and what is needed to achieve break-through with this tough audience, the better success we will be able to achieve. I realized that an effective integration strategy recognized the relationship between social media and our traditional marketing efforts, and I had much work to do to establish realistic strategies for implementation. My social media efforts need to be focused on the target market for SCS – use it in a way that reflects our drive to have Saskatoon families to want a Christian education.

The Millennial generation is larger than the Baby Boomers and three times that of Gen X, marketers need to understand Millennials' needs, tastes and behaviours which will clearly shape current and future business decisions. Benefits for SCS in using social media:

1. Affordable – more people time is required than a large budget
2. Viral – with simply a click of a button, our message goes to many friends
3. Building Credibility – the validity of user generated endorsements is Millennial in nature
4. Traffic increase – an integrated social media strategy will drive people to your website
5. Engagement of audience – we can connect with customers/respond to feedback in real time

Millennials are very inclined to explore brands on social networks – they want to interact with their brands. The information they use is not from marketers and definitely not from the media. Millennials have substituted TV and print to increased online activity and media consumption. They text, instant message and use the Internet is a variety of ways to get information from their peers and the community:

1. Social Media – Facebook (will check this 10 times/day), MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Second Life, Flickr; monitoring media to find/address complaints/questions about their product
2. Internet TV – Generation Y watch TV not only on the web but on portable devices as smartphones as well; only 26% watch TV for 20 hours or more per week (compared to 49% for non-Millennials) and when they do watch they are more likely to use services like Hulu or Netflix
3. Blogs – Blogs are great ways to communicate about a product without it seeming like an advertisement.

What I discovered was that while I had strategies for moving forward marketing SCS in the 'traditional' way, I did not know/understand the way to move through social media. What I wanted to do was avoid the problem-solving strategy of "doing social media" without understanding where all the marketing land mines were. The social media profiles are the start, not the end. They are not the task you should use to measure your results. A couple of points became clear:

1. 'Doing' social media was not the main objective; having an overall marketing strategy which included social media was needed (but was not present at SCS)
2. Getting a presence on social media was not an emergency! Measurements like 90-95% of people who 'like' a Facebook page never go back to it made me realize this needs to be done right and be sustainable.
3. Each of the pieces of social media must be interlinked. I need to link the pieces together so people who like SCS don't have to search for us. Linking the SCS Facebook page with our Twitter with a blog with our website is a critical part of making social media work for us.
4. Our website is home base – it is the most important online resource we have.

The expression "You only have one chance to make a first impression" is very true; if we do have a clear understanding of our audience, our efforts in this area will be marginal and not sustainable. We needed to integrate social media into the goals of the overall marketing plan of SCS. Marketing SCS is about building relationships, fostering a community, inspiring people to connect with SCS by helping them see how we will help them achieve their own goals and objectives.

The first question I felt was critical to the success of social media implementation was: Are the staff of SCS adaptable and prepared to accept this change to marketing? The ability to develop and manage the will to change how a school does its marketing is a contributing factor to the overall effectiveness of the social media initiative.

The first step was doing a **SWOT analysis** regarding our readiness for social media marketing. Without a SWOT analysis of an effective social media marketing strategic plan, it would be more difficult to effectively initiate a plan. We could look at the SWOT from both an internal and external view but, in practical terms, there are no real external threats (competition) to SCS at this time. (We thought at one time of including small cities in the trading area of Saskatoon but had to dismiss this idea as we did not feel we would be able to accept the numbers that would come.) The SWOT really was an examination to determine how we would proceed with our own marketing strategy for Saskatoon.

**Strengths:** SCS is (really) the only Christian school in Saskatoon; there is strong family loyalty to SCS; staff is very stable at SCS; we have a strong presence in Saskatoon through academics/athletics/music; leadership at SCS is strong and stable; marketing has been very traditional but effective to this point; linking activities of SCS to all aspects of media; social media allows almost instant updates; clear, audience- appropriate marketing will increase branding and, potentially, enrolment.

**Weaknesses:** SCS is not well represented in north part of city (this area is growing rapidly); appropriate marketing has not gone well because there is no competition; we are low on classroom space; Millennial-appropriate marketing is not established in SCS; privacy/security issues with website/social media; potentially, lack of people resources to maintain a strong marketing focus; do we have the creative people to develop meaningful high quality content and communication on a regular schedule; extra costs for resourcing an increased presence in marketing;

**Opportunities:** Subdivisions geographically close to the school are growing at a rapid pace; what are the gaps in the 'market' we need to see/fix; access road to be paved in summer 2013; building a new high school by 2017; website is set up for social media marketing; social media growth is exponential; Baby Boomers are increasing their use of social media – therefore it will reach both Millennials and Baby Boomers; the use of social media will have an impact on our present/future families in SCS; what are the escalation procedures and steps as we grow in our social media presence; increase customer relations/loyalty

**Threats:** Always the threat of provincial funding; potential loss of autonomy within SPED or Ministry of Education; growth of school may outstrip of ability of accept all grades of students; trend changes may cause a loss of interest/tastes; financing marketing may take money from other areas in SCS; is our leadership team on board with all the marketing strategies; what safeguards do we need to put into place to prevent the wrong message being published in social media; our Saskatoon competition is LCA and PCS – what is the potential that could cause problems for us and our programs; understand that most social media threats are self-inflicted (responding/responding in a timely manner, treat people decently, etc)

## SCS strategy for Social Media:

1. Overall Strategy: Where does social media fit in our 'big' plan
  - a. Identify the opportunities – place to start/end
  - b. Understand the risks – of not being engaged; being engaged
  - c. Assess social media readiness; SCS readiness
  - d. Create awareness and understanding of social media – challenges, risks, opportunities, current social media use
  - e. Determine/set clear social media policies/practices
  - f. Who – responsibility for ongoing activity/vision
2. Objectives: I determined what we wanted to do was:
  - a. Improve new family/existing family engagement; keep them updated on happenings, events, etc
  - b. Enhance our profile in the city of Saskatoon/area
  - c. Attract/drive new families/existing families to our sites (20% within six months)
  - d. Increase enrolment at SCS
3. Target audience(s)
  - a. Primary audience; secondary audience
  - b. Ages/Groups – Millennials (and children), Baby Boomers
  - c. Behaviours of the identified audiences – personal/professional
  - d. Online behaviour of audiences – mobile, PC's, apps
  - e. Identify relevant communities and conversations around social media use in Christian schools
4. Implement organizational structure to manage social media project:
  - a. Where do we start and what are the phases of our steps
  - b. Develop a business case for social media projects including risks, goals, and metrics; develop a roadmap for activity
  - c. Select social media tools (including build, configure, ongoing analysis, time-line); use Survey Monkey to find out where our families 'hang out' in social media (B2C strategies seem to imply Facebook will be the best start)
  - d. Determine staff, functional organizational requirements
  - e. Set avatar to the SCS logo; all pages use identical colour schemes
  - f. Identify the resources needed – skill level of people (volunteers, paid)
  - g. Identify the 'edges' in terms of time commitments/time saving techniques (use of tools like TweetDeck, Hootsuite)
  - h. Do we have the volume of content to ensure that when someone visits the SCS sites, they stay and browse our content?
  - i. What are the metrics of success (buzz/conversation, SCS awareness, traffic to social media sites/website, subscribers/followers/fans, audience insights); using Tracking Tools (Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, YouTube Insights, LinkedIn Analytics, etc)
  - j. Develop a "Social Networking Policy" for SCS – this will clearly identify the who works on social media, the when (it is a 24/7 activity), the what, the how
5. Phase in time for social media at SCS - This is the 'where do we start' time
  - a. Engagement plan:
    - i. Mar-May – Assess our social media readiness
    - ii. June-Sept – Revisit our social media goals – better family engagement, better family experience

- b. Determine the 'start' place (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and move to carefully begin our presence on this platform
6. Measure and Refine
  - a. Integrate with existing Internet strategy; integrate all social media platforms; integrate team members
  - b. Set timelines for measures of success, modifications
  - c. Timely monitoring of the measures
  - d. Articulate the success stories
  - e. As a SCS leadership team, analyse the measures
  - f. Refine our strategies, measures and objectives
7. Look to the future - ??????

**What to measure:**

- Number of visits to our content – do people find it relevant
- Number of re-tweets or share of our content link (do families find it interesting enough to share)
- Number of interactions and comments about SCS content (do people want to engage with it)
- Are we having an influence with those interacting with our content
- How many of the interactions with SCS content leads to another goal – forms being filled out, content downloaded, new family inquiry

➤ **Example of measuring one Social Media tool:**

SMART Objectives with Facebook (Facebook sees 50% of members log in daily)

- **Specific** – we generate 30 'likes' of our Facebook site
- **Measurable** – Use Facebook Insights to determine benchmark metrics (total interactions, interactions per post, post quality, stream CTR, reviews)
- **Achievable** – are our objectives achievable; what is the vision for the site
- **Relevant** – our goals for Facebook have a direct impact on enrolment inquiries
- **Timely** – We will re-examine objectives every 6 months

As Principal of SCS, I do not see my role as the 'social media marketing master' (it becomes a time issue and a "do we really want the educational CEO of SCS monitoring social media during the day/evening instead of improving instruction in the building" issue) – it is essential to find people who can assume these roles and become the champion of them. Presently we do not have this personnel (or expertise) which leaves a substantial gap in the 'doing' of many of the aspects of our marketing strategy.

We cannot be everything to everyone – we must be who we are to Saskatoon, Saskatoon Christian School families and potential Saskatoon Christian School families. Every contact we make – by word of mouth, by traditional marketing or by social media connects present/potential families to SCS. It also continues the process of God using SCS to "... transform lives through Christ-centred education."

**What we do and how we do it at SCS must be:**

**Sustainable, Practical, People-Oriented, Integrated**