

RELATIONAL MARKETING

FOSTERING COMMUNITY LOYALTY

Here's one of my favorite stories. "Several cotton farmers were whiling away a winter afternoon around the potbellied stove. As time passed they got into a heated discussion on the merits of their their respective trucks. The eldest of the farmers had been sitting quietly, just listening, when the group turned to him and demanded, 'Who's right, old Jim? Which one of these trucks is the best one?' 'Well,' said Jim thoughtfully, 'you know there are three ways to get from here to the cotton gin. You can go right over the big hill. That's shorter but it's a powerful climb. You can go around the east side of the hill. That's not too far, but the road is rougher'n tarnation. Or you can go around the west side of the hill, which is the longest way, but the easiest. But you know,' he said, looking them squarely in the eye, 'when you get there, the gin man don't ask you how you come. He just asks, 'Man, how good is y'er cotton?'"



Parents are the reason you have a school. There are a number of ways you can attract parents and convince them to enroll their children.¹ You can use yard signs, space advertising, newsletters, direct mail advertising, billboards, even radio. Each one of these "ways" can be effective. Nevertheless, just like those old farmers, nothing really matters about the "way" you market unless your marketing is about the "what." The "what" in the equation is relational not merely informational. Relationships are the "good cotton" that makes your marketing work.

Relational marketing is most often defined as a strategy designed to foster customer loyalty, interaction and long-term engagement.² It is designed to develop strong connections with customers³ by providing them with information directly suited to their needs and interests, by promoting open communication.

And if it's about "relationships" there's little doubt that "emotion" is involved. Emotion speaks to that rarified place where few schools reside. For just as in any relationship in life, touching on human emotions, preferably the positive emotions, is the key to any happy, healthy and long-term relationship.

¹ See Best Practices: Preplanning: www.catholicschoolsmarketing.com/white_papers.html.

² See Best Practices: Reasonable Marketing: www.catholicschoolsmarketing.com/white_papers.html.

³ See Best Practices: Effective Marketing: www.catholicschoolsmarketing.com/white_papers.html.

MAINTAINING A RARIFIED ENVIRONMENT

Reaching out to the community surrounding your school, instilling an awareness of the incredible products you have to offer, and pulling them into your Open House takes effort, time and financial resources. But the investment is essential if you want to build the relationships that build enrollment, maintain it, and give customers the opportunity to be advocates for you. To make your customers your fans, a rarified environment that self-perpetuates your enrollment growth through a committed relationship with you, your staff and the products you offer, make sure you focus on these three things:

1. **Performance:** A hot emotional bond with a parent recruit can cool pretty quickly if your curriculum becomes noncompetitive, staff doesn't live up to expectations, or your facility degrades.

Rule of thumb: *"Improved performance increases revenue thereby creating the opportunity to charge higher prices for a superior product."*

2. **Quality:** When you set targets for quality improvement in the educational products you offer, those goals can help you improve enrollment and keep customer referrals coming your way.

Rule of thumb: *"Quality improvements yielding better more competitive products, result in higher customer retention rates."*

3. **Risks:** Relational marketing involves risk. Marketing resources are expensive, especially when a repetitive strategy is engaged.⁴ Your goal is to mediate the risk, not eliminate it.

Rule of thumb: *"Less risk yields fewer marketing touches; the amount of touches is directly proportionate to advocacy opportunities."*

Identify the performance, quality and risk factors that are most important to your market and set measurable, reasonable targets for improvement. When your marketing team is focused on the relationships, the "cotton" will be all that matters .

Contact one of our Marketing Associates at 262-338-8538 and discuss how direct mail marketing and cutting edge print and design strategies can help preplan your next marketing campaign. We can help you develop a vision and mission statement, and assist in the development of a winning marketing plan. When you sell your product or service keep in mind that you are not just selling but you are recruiting customers through a strategy designed to capture their interest, make them think and eventually commit to joining your product and services team. Contact Pointer Marketing today and see why we always say "We're not the only choice, but we're honestly the right choice."



⁴ See Best Practices: Goal Marketing: www.catholicschoolsmarketing.com/whitepapers.html.