DATA-DRIVEN MARKETING STRATEGIES:

Using Data to Get Your School's Message Heard

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Contents

In this eBook, you'll discover how to:

- Assess where your school stands in its current marketing efforts
- Get everyone on the same page regarding a communication cycle
- Explore specific data to determine how your emails are performing
- Track your printed marketing materials for campaign success
- Maximize your social media marketing efforts

To learn more, visit https://k12hub.blackbaud.com/school-marketing.

INTRODUCTION

All too often, we find ourselves up against deadlines, struggling to produce something that we can send out to accomplish a project. We work to achieve the same overarching goals of raising more money and bringing in more tuition dollars, year after year. We send out postcards, brochures, emails, and tweets so we can check off items on a task list. We take on projects because that's our job—creating content and telling the stories of our schools.

But what if we took a different approach to marketing? Imagine what might happen if we took a step back and evaluated not only what we are doing, but why we are doing it and how effective it is for our target audiences. What if we stopped creating content just for the sake of content, and started creating content that our constituents actually wanted and worked to build momentum from year to year?

Well, then we would be creating a purposeful marketing strategy for our schools, designed to not only meet the goals of this year, but to also set ourselves up to exceed those goals next year and for many years to come. We want our work to matter, make a difference, and ensure that we will have years of successful recruiting and fundraising. Is it possible?

What if we stopped creating content just for the sake of content, and started creating content that our constituents actually wanted and worked to build momentum from year to year?

It is, and that is why we need to rely on the information around us to drive our marketing efforts and keep us on track. We need to make sure that we are not just checking off tasks on a list but also working to accomplish goals and improve our school communities: transformational work, not transactional. We need research that tells us if what we're doing is working and worth our time and resources. We need strategic reasons for staying the course or altering our plan of action. But where do we find this information, and how will we use it?

Not only will using data to drive your marketing and communication decisions help you be more effective, but it will ensure that you stay on a path to successful marketing outcomes. When you know what message to send to each constituent type, when to send it, and how to send it, you'll end up with happier and more engaged users who support, and even promote, your brand. In this eBook, I'll help you figure out what information you need, where to find it, and how to use it. I'll also share some tips and tricks to better use the tools and hacks available to you, so you can easily manage your work, and more importantly, show your return on investment.

CHAPTER

01

Creating a Foundation for Marketing

Data, when used correctly, can give you the information you need to develop a strong foundation for all your marketing initiatives. Research, demographics, surveys, and studies can provide inspiration for new ideas, point you in the right direction, and support your reasoning for your actions.

Understanding Your School's Position in the Marketplace

One of the most useful things you can do is assess where your school stands in the marketplace. To do this, you need to determine who your users are, what they think of your school, and what they want out of their experiences there. This starts with using research that is already available to you: information that covers your audience and your institution.

Marketing Reports

Some schools will work with a marketing consultant to do an in-depth study of their institution. This report holds a wealth of information that outlines your school's strengths, challenges, and directions in which you should go to advance. It likely breaks down your school's position in the marketplace, as well as provides key insight into how your current constituents view the institution. From this document, you should be able to outline those objectives that are realistically achievable in just one year.

Strategic Plans

The schools that haven't conducted a full marketing report should have a strategic plan: a school-wide document that identifies key goals for the institution and outlines action items for ensuring that those goal are met. This report is usually a result of a committee that represents all areas of the school community and is approved by the senior administration and the board of trustees, meaning that it has the backing of the entire school. These objectives should fuel your data-driven marketing plan by providing you with the outline for your work in regards to marketing priorities for the entire school.

Independent School Self-Study

If you don't have a marketing analysis or a strategic plan available to you, then you definitely have your school's self-study and accreditation report. This report is another research document that outlines your school's strengths and challenges and identifies goals for you moving forward. It's the same concept as the other research documents but less detailed with regards to your marketplace position. You can easily supplement this document with additional research.

Surveys, Focus Groups, and Interviews

If you don't have any of the above documents, or if your reports just aren't showing you enough to determine how your audience truly feels about your school, then look for the information elsewhere. Community surveys can be a great way to get questions answered, and using quantifiable questions like ranking systems, evaluations, and multiple choice options can help you dig into the details.

Questions with rating scales and options to give feedback after each question are an easy way to ask parents' opinions. Some ideas on what to ask include:

- Rate the facilities (get more specific by breaking down different areas of campus)
- Rate the teachers
    - Do teachers give the right amount of homework?
    - Do teachers provide regular feedback on homework and tests?
    - Do teachers respond quickly to parent inquiries?
- Rate the coaches
- Rate the food
- Rate the response time for questions directed to administrators
- Rate the school's commitment to its mission (you might also ask if parents know the mission of the school without researching it)

It's also important to understand the perception of the school in the community. Asking parents things like: What did you think about the school before applying? What has surprised you since you've enrolled?

Parents may provide harsh feedback, but it's necessary for you to know where you stand. This gives you a clearer understanding of the stereotypes and myths about your school that you need to combat in your marketing strategy. If your community thinks your school's student body is lacking diversity, then you need to focus on educating people on your diversity and the bountiful financial aid available to qualified families. Take the negatives, and use them as a teachable moment to educate your greater community.

If the data from your survey shows that alumni aren't feeling connected to your school or that prospective students don't know what sets you apart from other schools, then that information is a clear indicator of challenges you're going to encounter as you implement your marketing strategies. This tells you exactly what direction you need to take to move forward. These interviews should also uncover your strengths, not just your weaknesses. Capitalize on what you're doing well already, and improve upon the rest.

If you're concerned that your audience won't be honest with you, consider contracting a third party to conduct the surveys and/or focus groups or personal interviews to get a clear idea of where you stand. While you might not like what you hear, the information gathered will be invaluable as you work to improve relationships.

Understanding Your School's Communication Cycles for All Constituents

One of the major things to understand when building your data-driven strategies is that marketing doesn't just happen in your admission and development offices; it's part of your everyday school culture. Every experience that a current family has with your school is part of your overall reputation, and keeping this segment of your population happy is just as important as cultivating prospective students and donors.

So, how do you market to current families? The same way you market to your other constituencies: You make sure that you are addressing their needs. But you need to know what they need first. How do you figure that out? Ask them. A survey, as I mentioned before, can be a great way to do this. But you need to truly listen to what they say. Many schools shy away from asking the hard questions, but the truth is that you cannot grow and improve to meet your customers' needs if you don't know where you need to grow and improve. It's important to understand the needs of the majority of your audience and not just the needs of the loud few who bang on your office door every day. Remember that not everyone will be pleased. There will always be those outliers who just won't get in line, but it is not your job to make sure they get what they want. Your job is to concentrate on what will make the majority of your customers happy.

And don't forget to pay attention to those reports I mentioned earlier: marketing reports, strategic plans, and self- studies. These documents will help you decipher the information you obtain from your current constituents and make sense of the roadmap you're creating. Your marketing reports should help you identify your marketplace position for all current families and fine-tune your message, while your strategic plan helps you identify key goals and action items for accomplishing those goals. Remember the value of each of these documents.

Knowing How Often to Reach Out

It's important to also understand how much your school sends out to its communities. Every day, independent schools send out hundreds of messages—yes, hundreds daily. From tweets and Facebook® posts to personal emails, push pages, phone calls, and website notifications, we are constantly touching our audience, and every touch matters. Whether you work in admission, marketing, development, athletics, or community life, understanding what communication goes out to your constituents and how you can best leverage the tools available to you can help you improve your school's outreach efforts.

Many faculty members don't realize how many times a week a family might hear from the school. Let's assume that each student takes an average of six classes, each led by a different teacher, and that each teacher sends at least an email a week to students. If you're using a learning management system (LMS), then the student's classes are regularly generating notifications about assignments, tests, changes in work, and even group chats. That same student also has an advisor and most likely a coach as part of an afternoon program; that could equate to another two emails a week and countless notifications about practices, meetings, and games. Involved in the arts? Let's tack on another teacher contacting the student with reminders and changes in practice schedules and preparation for an upcoming show or concert. Don't forget schedule reminders, event reminders, and dress code reminders from the academic office or the student life office. Now add in personal emails from the student life office, academic office, parents' association, development office, business office, and health center. Have you lost count yet?

We haven't even started talking about the strategic marketing touches that go out to communities, either. Most likely your school has a weekly community eNewsletter (which hopefully is home to many of the aforementioned notices) and several social media accounts. Have an emergency notification service? There's another possible touch. In a given day, your constituents could receive more than 50 points of communication from the school. It's no wonder why we constantly hear that people have no idea what's happening at our schools; there's too much to keep track of! But, there's hope. You can manage this onslaught of communication through marketing strategies that will make everyone at your school happier, better informed, and more engaged. How, you ask?

Each department should have a general idea of what it produces annually, so start by collecting this information: who sends out what, how, and when. And then record it all on one communication calendar.

Admission Office

Sit down with the admission office. You'll likely find that your admission office sends out print and digital notices regarding travel dates, open house events, and application deadlines. You'll probably also see an increase in outreach to constituents prior to each major event, as well as in December through February before the application deadline and then again before the March notification deadline and the April enrollment deadline. This is important to make note of because of the possibility that a current family has a younger sibling apply or that an alumnus has a child apply. Mark those on a calendar.

Alumni and Development

The alumni and development office will likely have three or four print appeals for the annual fund spaced out during the year, plus a few major events, and several smaller events. It's common for November and December to be busy communication periods for development, with year-end giving pushes, National Philanthropy Day, #GivingTuesday, and holidays. Assume that June is another busy month for development communication efforts, as the fiscal year comes to a close. Plus, you've got your magazine and possibly monthly or quarterly newsletters to alumni. Don't forget reunions or Homecoming, either. How many official emails and print pieces are produced for those events? Mark it all down on the calendar.

Student Life Office

This office often generates a lot of family communication, especially if you're a boarding school. Weekend events, parent permission forms, school vacation travel arrangements, opening and closing of school information—the list goes on. Don't forget dress code changes, event updates, or activity reminders. If your school has international students, make sure you include their communication schedules, too.

Academics Office

The academic office, not including teachers, has its own set of expected communications surrounding add-drop periods, course selection times, honor roll announcements, summer reading, and textbook purchases. This includes your college counseling office and any tutoring programs that might be sending out regular communication. Add it all to the calendar.

Athletics

The athletics department tends to have constant communication thanks to automated systems that share practice and game schedules. But there are peaks in this activity—at the beginning of each season when students are getting involved in pre-season practices and again at the end of each season when athletic awards happen and uniforms are collected. Yes, uniform collection can warrant a considerable amount of communication. Mark it all down on your calendar.

Fine and Performing Arts

Do you have regularly scheduled art gallery shows, concerts, plays, and recitals? Regular practice schedules and reminders of after school rehearsals? Yes, the arts department also needs to be included in this school-wide communications calendar.

Head of School

Your head of school's office should also be included. Known travel dates, board meetings, and major events like Convocation and Commencement should all be included if communication is sent out to families about each occurrence. If your head has a newsletter, all-school email message schedule, or annual state-of-the-school report, mark it all down.

Business Office

Don't overlook your business office. When are student billing statements sent to families? When does reenrollment happen? These are important communication touches to keep track of, because you don't want to be asking for annual fund donations at the same time that tuition is due! Add it all to the calendar.

Summer Program

Have a summer camp? When do they start recruiting efforts, and how are they reaching out to constituents? Mark it down.

Marketing and Communications

Finally, make sure all the marketing and communications efforts are marked down. It's likely that there are communications efforts that aren't included in the lists from other departments, like weekly newsletters, bookstore sales events, or targeted social media campaigns.

Once you've done this, congratulations! You've just successfully created what is likely an overwhelming schedule of communication. Now, it's time to use this information to start delving into the effectiveness of your communication efforts. Figure out what asks are competing with each other, which ones need to move, and if you're repeating your messages too often or not enough.

In addition, think about how you can strategically plan out your communication schedule. If reenrollment contracts, annual fund asks, grade reports, and billing statements are all coming out at once, your parents likely won't be happy. Don't ask for donations when you're asking families to pay a bill, and don't time billing requests around a major holiday. Instead, think about how you can capitalize on the happy times of the year. For example, use Parents' Weekend to ask for donations.

Analyzing What You've Found

Now that you have this information, it's important to do something with it. Review the overlapping communications, determine where there's too much outreach and not enough, and figure out what can be consolidated or eliminated. Maybe your bookstore announcements can be pulled into your weekly newsletter, as well as all the information about weekend events, calendar listings, schedule changes, and dress code reminders. Maybe the fifth mention of the upcoming event at the library, which is already sold out, can be eliminated completely.

Look for trends of what performs well. If you're using a service like Pushpage®, MailChimp®, or Constant Contact®, look at open rates and click rates. Use that data to determine when certain messages perform the best and what type of messaging or subject lines work best. If two annual fund emails went out and one performed well and one did not, find out why. Was one subject line more engaging than the other? Did one email contain too many images and not enough text or vice versa? Was it timed to coincide with something else? Determining these performance trends can help you streamline your work immensely and help you develop an overall communications strategy to ensure that consistent messaging is sent out in a manner that makes sense.

Finding Even More Data to Drive Your Strategy

Once you've assessed your communications output, it's time to look at the quality of that output and what you need to make that determination. When combined, the reports and communication cycles we talked about are great tools to use as you build your data-driven strategy, but there's still more data to use in other ways. The next place to look for more crucial data is right in your office databases. These digital directories are a wealth of information just waiting to be used. Your admission and development offices likely have extensive databases that contain valuable insight into user behavior to help drive your marketing efforts.

Work with your development office to mine valuable information from its database, which tells you how often donors connect with the school and their giving history. If your records are strong, you might even be able to drill down into career paths or past interests. It's always interesting to look at the quantifiable information that's available to you, as well. What stories are your alumni telling?

What matters most to them when they think about their history with the school and involvement since graduation? This information can help you develop a strategy that will reach your donors and encourage more donations from them and their peers. It can help you begin to segment and target different audiences in different ways.

For example, if you know that 50 percent of your donors prefer to give online, then you may want to consider focusing more on your digital appeals for them. That means printing fewer hard copies of each appeal, which translates into more money that you can put toward your print budget for the 50 percent of your donors who don't give online. Take that a step further, and send segmented emails to everyone based on interests: Athletic interests receive an email that showcases how the annual fund supports your teams, while those with arts interests receive an email that illustrates how the arts department benefits from unrestricted gifts. That's targeted marketing based on data.

The same idea applies to your admission database; ideally your inquiry and application forms have fields that tell you where your users found you: online, school fair, advertising, word of mouth, etc. Your admission database also should point out how many times you've had to communicate with a family to get them to complete their applications and how many inquiries and applications you need to yield one new student. If you've spent the last four years advertising in your regional newspaper but 80 percent of your inquiries are coming from online sources, you might think about trying to reallocate those funds to digital advertising, or put them toward hosting a reception in your most popular travel location. Similar to the alumni segmentation, you can start to drill down your content to target student ages, programs of interests, sports, and arts. All of this information helps you figure out where to put your efforts and your budget for optimal marketing impact. This sets the stage for your actual marketing plans and campaigns.

CHAPTER 02

Developing Comprehensive Marketing Campaigns

At many schools, the word campaign means capital campaign, but for the purpose of this eBook, it means marketing campaign: the coordinated, planned effort for achieving a specific goal. This can vary from department to department, and you'll likely have multiple campaigns happening at once—with admission and development being the two departments that are usually in the spotlight.

Your successful marketing campaign should build off the knowledge of how past projects performed, and look to capitalize on the biggest successes and adjust your course of action for the aspects of outreach that left you less than satisfied. Your marketing campaign should combine print and digital media, and provide a foundation for personal interactions that align with a common theme.

Creating a streamlined and coordinated approach to outreach that focuses on giving your audience a clear and specific goal is essential to any successful marketing campaign. And once you have that coordinated approach that combines the various methods for reaching out to your constituents, sticking to that plan is crucial. Deviating from your path detracts from the messages you're trying to convey and has the potential to confuse your audience.

How does this happen? In today's day and age, digital communication is a main method of outreach, especially for schools communicating with international audiences. Make the mistake of deviating from your messaging and aesthetic style choices in one single email, and your audience might think your request for an annual fund gift is a phishing expedition from a scammer. Not only have you missed an opportunity to gain a gift, you've also lost their sense of trust in what they receive from you. Coordinated and consistent messaging and style is essential to the success of your marketing campaigns.

The Data-Driven Annual Fund

Let's take a look at how a coordinated outreach effort might come to life with an annual fund marketing campaign. You'll likely have one or two main goals in mind to begin with; for example, dollars to raise and a level of participation to achieve. Hopefully, these goals will align with any strategic plans you have, and you'll create a mission-appropriate theme to make it happen.

You might have specific points of contact and calls to action in mind that will be key to your campaign, such as:

- A thank you to donors from the previous year
- An annual report of giving
- A kickoff to the new annual fund year
- A family weekend and/or Homecoming giving ask
- A #GivingTuesday program
- An end-of-the-calendar-year reminder (make your tax-deductible gifts!)
- A reunion giving plug
- An end-of-the-school-year ask
- The June 30 touch—last day to give

Last year's information can help you determine where to focus your attention. Look at how your giving page performed, and see if you need to make it easier to use or more mobile friendly. Evaluate your email performance, your social media activity, and your response to print materials. Using the data from your previous year, ask yourself:

- Which of these points of contact were most effective?
- What absolutely knocked it out of the park and should be repeated?
- Should any of these touches be changed from print to digital or digital to print?
- What type of digital should you be using—email, social, web pages, microsites, apps? Were you missing important touches at any point in the year?
- Did you ask too often?
- Did your type of ask vary?
- Could one touch be eliminated altogether?
- Are you sending non-asks in addition to fundraising asks?
- Where should those non-ask touches fall?
- When should you email your families?
- When should you send a postcard?
- How many business reply envelopes should you send?
- How often should you send out fundraising information on social media?

This assessment counts as data. Figuring out how each of these points of contact can work together in unison and be complemented by social media outreach, phone-a-thons, and personal conversations can help you make the most of your outreach. In turn, this allows you to develop a plan that when executed properly, can ensure that your constituents feel valued, appreciated, and willing to open their wallets to support your school.

It's also important to take into consideration what you can realistically accomplish in a given year. Budgets, manpower, and time constraints all come into play. Part of developing a strategy is saying no. No, we can't afford that. No, not every great idea can come to life, and you can't always say every single thing you want to say in one message. No, not every point of contact can be exactly the same, nor can they be completely different. No, you can't take the exact content from your print piece and email it out to the same constituents.

Chances are you'll be asked why, and it's your job to answer. Explaining the timeline for developing a project and mapping out deadlines and what's needed can quickly change the course of action. Explaining the ways in which print and digital marketing are perceived and the types of messaging that are appropriate in each form of outreach can help people understand why repetition isn't the best way to get your message across. Explaining the concept of creating a sense of recognition in design and aesthetics to increase the effectiveness of your outreach can help your client better understand why you're saying no.

Use the data and expertise that you have to clearly illustrate user behaviors and benefits of specific components of your campaign. Spacing out your communication gives your audience time to rest, relax, continue on in their life, and look forward to receiving your next communication. If your audience doesn't know what you want or feels overwhelmed by you, they won't complete the task at hand. If your audience feels like you're being redundant, they will tune you out. Your goal is to provide recognition but keep them wondering what's coming next.

The Data-Driven Website Design

When it's time to look at your website, data can greatly affect your redesign or even your regular updates. Using data is the only way to ensure that your final product truly meets the goals set by your institution and serves the needs of your target audience. Reviewing the goals of the institution is an important first step, because it provides background for all your plans. Look at who your target audience is for this endeavor. Let's assume that the public site is targeted to prospective students, with current families and alumni having their needs met behind the password.

Background Research and Testing

A series of surveys and focus groups might be the best way for you to learn about and assess the needs of the target audience. Send surveys to individuals currently involved in the admission process, as well as those students whose contact information can be found elsewhere. Your survey should assess overall experience, content needs, and ease of navigation. You might consider also soliciting feedback from current and prospective constituents through live focus group style interviews. Your open house events are a great place to have these personal interactions.

You may want to assess the navigation menu trends among your peer schools. Deviating from the traditional navigation can be disastrous. When we were working on the redesign at Cheshire Academy, we proposed a new take on the traditional navigational elements. As part of our diligent effort to ensure that it worked, we repeatedly tested the new elements to improve the user experience and drive the final design.

Using tools from Optimal Workshop, we were able to say with a high degree of certainty exactly what our users needed to successfully navigate our site. After the first workshop, we tried out a function called Card Sort, which gave users the power to essentially design their own navigation menu on the website. We hoped that users would get creative and come up with new, innovative ways to structure the menus. But, the majority of users chose to create buckets that closely resembled the traditional navigation items: About, Admission, Academics, Athletics, Arts, and Support.

We weren't going to be deterred, though, and we held strong to our belief in the idea that an innovative approach to navigation would prevail. So, we set out to test a new style of menu. This exercise used split testing and asked users to find specific items within a new Call-to-Action menu and the more traditional menu. The results? The users were overwhelmingly in favor of the traditional menu system, proving that our seemingly amazing idea wasn't going to work. In the end, the research is what drove the final decision for the site's navigation architecture and helped us achieve maximum performance for a positive user experience.

Usage Trends and Assessment

Tools like Google Analytics® can help you determine how your website is performing. Whether you're assessing performance before a redesign or just enhancing your overall site, this information can point you in the right direction. Understanding the ways in which your community consumes your information is a huge part of any successful website strategy. For example, mobile devices require responsive sites and often a simpler approach to design. Perhaps the bulk of your website hits are from desktop computers, but the majority of your email readership is on a mobile device. This might change the ways in which you approach each section of your digital communication.

Look at which site pages get the most traffic and which get the least. Keep improving those pages that perform well; update them regularly to ensure that information is relevant and that traffic doesn't decline. Look at the pages that aren't performing well and determine if they are even necessary. If your calendar isn't performing well, then you might need to look at how you're using that tool and develop a stronger strategy. If a welcome letter from a dean or department head is a stand-alone page that isn't getting any traffic, perhaps that's one page you can safely say your constituents don't find valuable, and you don't need it. Look at incorporating that message into another page or delivering it in a completely different way.

Usage trends, such as where your users are geographically located, can also be a useful tool. If you're getting lots of attention from a country in Europe, yet you have no students from that country enrolled, you might want to scour your alumni resources to see if there's a pocket of alumni in that region. Or if you're a boarding school, work with your admission office to find ways to get your message out in that area.

CHAPTER 03

Using Data to Determine the Success of Your Marketing Campaigns

To determine if your marketing campaigns are successful, you need to have benchmarks and goals. This is where the research we talked about earlier will come into play. Logging all the behavior patterns associated with your previous communication efforts will give you a clear idea of what works well and what doesn't. These patterns include:

- Open and click rates in email
- Number of clicks, likes, and comments in social media
- Timing of online gifts—did they coincide with digital or print efforts?
- Number of business reply envelopes received
- Phone calls in response to print pieces

Once you know how your work performed last year, you can set benchmarks for comparisons and work to achieve new goals.

The Success of Data-Driven Print Marketing

If we're talking about print marketing, you're going to have to dig into data a bit more than digital platforms, but it can be done. The time and resource investment that goes into any successful print marketing effort is significant thanks to the added cost of printing and mailing and additional weeks needed for printing and mailing. Despite the challenges, print marketing can be a major return on investment for your school.

Did you even track the effectiveness of your print marketing last year? If not, your number one goal is to track it using a few tricks. Keep in mind that the effectiveness is not going to be quite as clear as with most digital campaigns, but you can easily get a general idea of how each piece performs.

Every print piece should contain a web address where constituents can go online to complete a specific call to action. It may be to register for an event, make a gift, or inquire about your school. Using unique URLs that send users to specific landing pages for each printed publication lets you easily see how many people migrate from your print piece to the web. Landing pages can be connected to your analytics account and show how many people went to the site and left vs. how many people went to the site and completed the task at hand. You can watch the performance of your landing page to determine if you need to adjust the information on the page depending on how many people convert from a visitor to an active user by completing a form.

Any time a print piece can contain a postage-paid envelope or reply card, that's another opportunity to track a piece's effectiveness. It's a huge help to your audience to ensure that the envelope is a postage paid envelope. Not everyone keeps a stash of stamps, and if you're asking someone to make a gift to your school's annual fund, covering the cost of postage could make the difference in getting that donation. Remember to make sure that every envelope or reply card contains a code unique to its campaign, so when it makes its way back to your office, you can track the success in your database.

Your print marketing might also have a call to action to connect with someone. Tracking personal connections surrounding the piece is important when it comes to determining your return on investment. Make note of even the smallest conversation, because every bit of support has value.

Look for trends in activity, too. Your print materials should be scheduled to hit homes when there aren't any other solicitations coming from your school. Your vendor can tell you when an item hits the post office, and you can safely assume that for the next week, the majority of your online activity and unprovoked personal connections are a direct result of the print piece.

You might find that an audience of a certain age or generation responds better to one type of outreach method than another, and tracking this behavior can help you segment what you send to users and how you send that message to your users in the future.

The Success of Data-Driven Email

Assuming that you're using an email marketing program, you are going to have access to incredible data that will help you adjust and improve your quality of outreach. How many emails did you send? How many people opened each one? How many people clicked your links?

Determine the average behaviors of your varying constituent bases of last year, and set new goals for this year. Keep in mind that different audiences will have varying degrees of success when it comes to open rates. For example, your faculty should be among your highest open rate: A small, highly engaged community should perform well with 70 percent open rates and higher. Current students and parents tend to also perform well, because they are engaged with you on a daily basis.

Where you start running into a bigger challenge is with your alumni and prospective students. In theory, your alumni should be more engaged than prospective students, but your community may vary depending on the strength of relationships and how much your constituents rely on email communication. Did your emails to alumni receive a 25 percent open rate last year? Aim for 40 percent this year.

Pay attention to when you send marketing emails to help determine the best schedules. An email sent on a holiday might not perform well, but an email sent the day after a holiday might get a surge in opens. If you're an international school, you may look at segmenting your send times by time zones, aiming to not have your emails hit an inbox at 2:00 a.m. when your audience is likely asleep.

Subject lines and wording of text can play a huge role in the success of your marketing. Trying different tactics with your audience through A/B testing might be useful. By playing with different types of subject lines,you can find out what your audience responds to best. Perhaps emails with subject lines that are questions vs. statements will encourage more opens. Emojis, capitalization, and length of subject lines can all play a factor in level of engagement.

The messaging inside your email can also affect the likelihood that the reader will engage beyond opening. Maybe a giant photo deters the reader from scrolling or having four buttons confused the reader on the call to action. Even colors of buttons can engage readers in different ways and encourage or discourage action.

By carefully reviewing if people open your emails, where they click, and what they click on, you can fine-tune your strategy for the next email. If everyone clicked the photo at the top of the email but it doesn't actually take the reader anywhere, you've missed an opportunity to convert. Looking at the analytics of your email can help you determine if your audience is more likely to click text or buttons and if they're more likely to click links at the bottom or top of the page. In addition, take note of the wording and call to actions.

If users never click on the call to donate button but always click a photo, they may be trying to tell you that they want something other than a request for money. Oblige those users and provide content they will find useful. Share a news story from your site, photos from a recent event, or link to a blog topic, so they begin to look forward to your emails. You might even skip the ask, so you can start building relationships. Use what you learn from these analytics to alter your course of action for the next time, and see if your open and click rates go up. Don't expect monumental jumps every time you click send; it takes time for your audience to learn that your emails are worth opening and interacting with every time.

The Success of Data-Driven Social Media

From analytics to growth hacking, social media thrives on brands producing good content and audience members consuming it. While not every story you produce is going to go viral, you can use data to predict the kinds of stories that will get the most engagement. Some of these tips and tricks will help you reach more of your audience members, even if they're not already following you.

The obvious first step here is to look at the analytics of how your social media efforts are performing. It's not enough to occasionally glance at your social metrics. You need to investigate the details, analyze the results, and draw conclusions that will help you better plan out how you're going to take advantage of your social networks. You should know your top-performing posts each month and your biggest influencer on Twitter®. You should also be monitoring the growth of your followers and their ages. You might be surprised by what you find.

Exploring this data isn't a quick job. That's why many schools have added dedicated social media managers to their marketing and communication teams. This important information can provide you with an inside look at what your audience wants to read and when they want to read it. Fortunately, there are tools that can help.

Hootsuite® has emerged as one of the top scheduling services out there, providing ways for multiple people to collaborate on managing an institution's online presence. What many people don't know, however, is that it also provides some useful analytics. The service connects with your Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest®, Google+®, and Google Analytics. You can not only use it to schedule out posts in advance and track the interactions you get, but the data can also help you accomplish a number of things. Hootsuite can help you figure out who your key influencers are, which can help you leverage those users to create buzz around important conversations that you want to get out there. The service also calculates the performance of your content, measuring clicks, likes, retweets, and engagement to help you figure out which content your audience likes best.

Something many people don't realize is that the top social media outlets provide their own powerful analytics. It may mean running more than one report each month, but the insight you gather could prove to be worth the extra time.

Assuming that you have at least 30 likes on your Facebook page (you can amass those likes in an hour just by asking faculty to get on board), you will have access to Facebook's powerful analytics tool, very simply named Insights. Page administrators can use this data to determine the best time of day to post, the best day of the week to post, and what type of content your audience responds to the best. From followers and shares to likes—and now loves, laughs, and more—you'll have plenty of information to help you learn about how your audience consumes your content and what they like best.

Did you know that Twitter now offers its own analytics tool? That's right. Visit analytics.twitter.com and sign in with your account. You'll have all the details you need to analyze the success of your Twitter activity. Use this information to figure out what content and topics your followers want the most, and use that to drive your content strategy. If your audience isn't connecting with your message, you might as well be standing in the middle of a crowded room talking to no one. You want to connect with your user, and this data can help you do just that. Twitter's analytics also break down impressions, engagements, and engagement rates for each tweet you post, paid and organic. It also takes into account retweets, follows, replies, favorites, and clicks. It's a treasure trove of data for you to use. Use the data in this service to also watch the growth of your followers over time. You'll see trends in when you get the most followers and when you lose them, which can help you identify reasons for these changes.

Other programs provide more of a one-stop experience with a dashboard view into all your analytics, across a variety of social platforms. Get engagement rates, demographics, and trends all in one convenient place. While these third-party sites might be more convenient, you might lose some the minute data that can only be obtained from Facebook Insight or Twitter Analytics. But, any data is better than no data.

Most people think analytics are the extent of the data used to drive your efforts. While they do provide crucial insight into your markets, that type of data is just the beginning. We're all looking to increase the effectiveness of our social media efforts, so head over to your databases and start digging. From gaining more followers to making sure the right people see your message, there are several things you can do with information you already have to maximize your outreach.

How do you tell your alumni or newly enrolled families about your Facebook page? Send an email with a link? Sure, that works. But, there's another to way to get their attention that will show up directly in their Facebook notifications. Facebook gives you the option to suggest pages to followers. Head to your database and export a list of email addresses, and then turn around and import them into this feature on Facebook. If users are found in the system, Facebook will suggest your page to them for you—simple, yet extremely effective.

Facebook also provides the names of people who interact with your content but don't like your page. We all love watching the likes build up on our most popular posts (even the not as popular ones), but did you know that you can use that little piece of information to promote your page? Click on the number of likes, and you'll see a nice list of everyone who liked your post. Better yet, you'll also see which users have liked your content but not your page. Facebook makes it simple to connect with them, placing a nifty invite button right next to their names. This simple trick helps you directly target people who have already engaged with your content, but haven't made the jump to like your page yet. This invitation will also show up in their notifications and is a simple way to increase your page likes.

From here, you can start prioritizing goals for each major office on campus, and build a plan for achieving those goals. You won't be able to take on every goal in these documents at once, so pick the ones that are the most pressing and most realistic. If you have large goals, think about how a smaller goal can help achieve that. In terms of development, if you're looking to grow the annual fund, a strategy to do that might be to cultivate new donors who haven't given before. In terms of admission, to get more applications, you first need to focus on more inquiries.

Using Data to Determine Next Steps

Chances are your goals are going to continue to change year to year, but once you have your data-driven marketing strategies in place and benchmarking results documented, working to continually improve your outreach efforts will get easier and easier. You don't have to tackle every aspect of data-driven marketing at once, especially if you're a small shop, but dipping your toes in and getting a sense of how your work is performing can greatly help you shape your workflow, reason with departments, and work to save you and your school a great deal of time and money.

About the Author

Inspired by her own private school experiences, Stacy Jagodowski has devoted her career as a faculty member and administrator to introducing others to the private school world. Her career has focused on institutional advancement, with five years of admission experience and more than a decade in marketing and communications.

Stacy currently works as director of communications and marketing at Alice and Nahum Lainer School in Los Angeles. Prior to that, she led strategic marketing and communications teams at Cheshire Academy and Milken Community Schools; at Cheshire, her team earned award winning recognition for its annual fund marketing programs and overall team development.

She blogs for several private school organizations and has given several webinars and podcasts about private school marketing best practices. She has also presented at national conferences, including the NAIS Annual Conference, TABS Annual Conference, NAIS TABS Global Symposium, and Blackbaud's K–12 User Conference.

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