



# How to develop your brand: Tips for marketing your school or academy

In this e-book, we take a look at the ways in which you can market your school or academy, both online and in traditional media. Whether you're looking to brand a new school, or create a marketing push for an establishment steeped in tradition, this e-book will provide targeted support.

**Chapter 1:** Why do schools need marketing?

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## Chapter 1: Why do schools need marketing?

It's not just businesses that require marketing and branding activities, but schools and academies too. As Ofsted's regulations have changed to require schools to have an online presence, it's now more important than ever to dedicate time to a marketing strategy.

In order to create a successful marketing strategy for your school or academy, a school must differentiate themselves from local competition whilst also highlighting their strengths to prospective students, as well as teachers looking for positions.

### Getting started

**How will your local community know you're successful if you don't tell them?  
Don't be too modest; sing your praises and make sure you highlight your strengths,  
whether it's exam results or students extra curricular successes.**

#### Why do schools need to market themselves?

- **For admissions.** Schools and academies depend on applications for all year groups, and whilst you can to some extent rely on word of mouth, employing a marketing strategy could really increase your applicants for intake.
- **Recruiting teachers.** As with any business looking for ideal candidates, it's great to promote yourself. Highlighting your specialisms, extra curricular activities and areas for development can help in this process.
- **Creating contacts between connecting schools.** An important time in any students life can be their choice of their connecting school. Moving on from primary school, or from a 6<sup>th</sup> form can be an ideal time to market to these students, but also a great time to make your school known to other schools, to help your students bid appear appealing to the schools they are applying for.



**If there are several schools in your area, effective marketing can help you stand out by highlighting your specialisms and strengths.**

#### But who do schools need to market to?

- **Prospective students and their families.** Increasing admissions is important for all types of schools, and successful marketing can help boost applications for all years.
- **Local community.** There will be several opportunities for members of your local community to get involved with school activities and events, so promoting them to local residents can be a great way to interact with your community.
- **Successful teachers.** Whilst it's important to appear attractive to potential students, it's also imperative to recruit great teachers too. This will mean marketing your school on different platforms than traditionally used to market your school to students, such as teacher specific publications.
- **Local press and media.** Your local newspapers will be a great resource to promote your school, especially during exam season. Establishing contacts with a journalist or news desk manager can really pay dividends in the future.



## Chapter 2: Why your school brand is important

### Brand

Positioning your school effectively in the local community is important, as it sets you apart from your competition. Does your school specialise in a subject area, or are your facilities exceptional? Highlighting this, along with any plans you might have for future developments, can help define your schools brand. Before defining your brand, you should establish your target audience, and the actual audience of your school marketing.

Whilst companies have differing requirements when it comes brand positioning, the same considerations should be examined for schools and academies. Your brand identity is your school values and ethos – it's the culture of your school and how you present it outwardly. Whether you're a new academy starting out or an independent school steeped in rich history, your brand and identity is as important in attracting new students, as it is in giving your students a group personality.

**To start to establish your brand, you must first establish your strengths, and what sets you apart from other schools in your local community.**

- Does your school have an admissions policy, or an entrance test?
- Does your school have any subject specialisms?
- Does your school, your grounds, or the local area, have an interesting history?
- Does your school have exceptional facilities or links with local companies?
- Is your school award winning, or highly commended?
- Do you have any winning sports teams, or cadet forces on campus?
- Do you offer a range of different courses to students?

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**According to the Business Dictionary, a brand is defined as:**

*“Unique design, sign, symbol, words, or a combination of these, employed in creating an image that identifies a product and differentiates it from its competitors. Over time, this image becomes associated with a level of credibility, quality, and satisfaction in the consumer's mind.”*

### Why is it important?

**Defining your brand sets you apart from other schools, which is vital when parents and prospective students are selecting a school. It can also help give your students an identity, from performing at sports events to competing for the best exam results in the city.**

**Other benefits for implementing a consistent brand message are:**



**Unifying your school's message, across departments and year groups.**



**It drives the feeling authority and trust, as they appear reliable.**



**It demonstrates value and makes the school appear more credible.**

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### Primary and middle schools

As primary schools are the start of most students' journeys, it's key to highlight the development opportunities available within your school. From nurturing your students' development both in and out of the classroom, to keeping your students safe and happy, a primary school marketing plan should also emphasise how your school prepares students for later life. Middle schools help continue this great work started by primaries, and can create an overlap with marketing between lower and upper schools.

**Remember:** Primary schools are the start to any students journey, so your marketing focus could highlight how nurturing your environment is, and what tools you use to ensure they get the best start to their education.



### Secondary schools

As students progress into secondary school, the emphasis tends to focus on exams and vocational training. With this in mind, many senior schools quote their values as being deeply vested in student excellence and ambition, whilst retaining their community values. When marketing a secondary school to prospective students, many schools highlight their community values, how they prepare their students for working life, and giving them a sense of responsibility.

**Remember:** Ofsted requires schools to clearly present their latest exam results on their website, something a prospective parent will be very interested in. When marketing a secondary school, mention how well prepared your students are for later life – both with their exam results, and additional extra curricular activities.



### Independent schools

Traditionally, independent schools have a long history and strong links with their neighbouring city or town. Bearing this in mind, independent schools tend to focus on this when marketing their school to prospective students. As independent schools are usually fee paying, marketing should highlight the benefits of enlisting your child at this establishment. Benefits normally include smaller class sizes, leading to greater focus on the individual students needs and progression – both with academic focus and extra curricular development, and an interest in student welfare, especially for schools that include boarders.

**Remember:** Focussing on your school's rich history can really add depth to your marketing strategy



### Academies

Academies are different to traditional free schools as they are publicly funded independent schools. Academies don't have to follow the curriculum set by the government but can determine their own learning framework. Bearing this in mind, some academies focus their curriculum on their specific specialism, if they have one – something that should be highlighted in your marketing strategy. Some academies may have sponsors, such as local universities or businesses, which will then become responsible for the performance of the school. Partnering with the sponsor in your marketing efforts can ensure greater exposure, as well as a sense of legitimacy in your academies provisions. Many academies also talk about how they take learning beyond the classroom – highlight this if it applies to you.

**Remember:** Focus on what sets you apart from other schools in your area – whether it's your specialist curriculum or vast extra curricular activities



### Special school

Special schools traditionally cater for fewer students, and therefore have smaller class sizes. Referencing the skills of your SENCO can be a great place to start when marketing your school to potential new students, as well as mentioning the great facilities you have available. How do you safeguard students? Do you offer any extra curricular activities to support your students learning? These are all important questions that can offer prospective students – and their families – a real insight into life at your school.

**Remember:** Emphasize the opportunities you offer your students. Highlighting this can really differentiate your school from local providers, and show students what you are able to offer them.



### Schools and academies with specialisms

Does your school have a specialism, or have a niche offering which differentiates it from others in your community? Your school's specialism sets you apart, but how does this improve your students' attainment and enrich the curriculum offered? It's useful to highlight this in your marketing plan, along with any awards or events your school enters into, to showcase the opportunities on offer at your institution. Demonstrating the transferable skills learnt from your specialist subject can also help prospective students decide if this is the school for them.

**Remember:** Demonstrating the links between your school and the local community can be a great way to market your school's specialism. How do you give back to primary schools or community groups – do you offer specialist workshops?



### Traditional marketing tools

When marketing your school to prospective new students, it's key to establish the tools you wish to use early on in your strategy. Will your potential new students and their families read the local newspaper, or will they prefer to get their news online? Utilising traditional marketing tools can help spread your school's message further, and this chapter will show you which platforms can be used

#### What is a marketing tool?

Marketing tools, as defined by Business Dictionary, are the techniques and materials used by those who are involved in the promotion of goods and services – in this instance, your school. Utilising market research, such as a stakeholder analysis, can also help when targeting your marketing messages and deciding which platforms to use.

#### Traditional marketing tools

Traditional marketing tools are the most established forms of communication used in marketing. Below, we have outlined the types of tools you can use, and their benefits and limitations.



# Prospectuses and school brochures

You give them out on open days, and you may even distribute them to feeder schools. Your school prospectus is one of the main marketing tools your school can use, and when designed professionally it can be extremely effective in increasing admissions. Does your school have exceptional grounds, or do you have a new building or facilities? Using great photography in a prospectus can really show off what your school or academy has to offer.

### Benefits

Physical hard copy is available to everyone – prospective parents won't be restricted from accessing the prospectus (alternatively, not all may be able to access online files).

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### Limitations

One-way communication, unlike social media or internet advertising, which offers a two-way conversation.

## How prospectuses can be used to promote your school

It can be argued that your school prospectus is the most important marketing tool your school could employ. Attending local events and having prospectuses on hand can ensure prospective students remember your school, but what should you include in it? Highlighting your schools strengths and unique qualities can be a great place to start, but including high quality photography can give you a real edge. Everything down to the print quality of the brochure, to the hand-outs included can really help your school stand out when it matters

# Public Relations (PR)

Traditionally seen as a communication format for businesses, PR can also be used to effectively market your school or academy. Anything from writing articles about your school to working with local journalists to cover a school event can be a great way to market your school, and it's students.

## Benefits

Gets your school into local publications, and in front of a relevant audience.

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## Limitations

As with prospectuses, PR can typically be a one-way conversation

## How PR can be used to promote your school

In order for your school or academy to strengthen its brand image, or marketing, it should target its messages where your target audience already are. Do they read the local newspaper, or a regional magazine? This is where your message should be. PR might not seem the obvious choice, but creating press releases highlighting school successes or events can help maintain a connection between prospective students, whilst also strengthening relationships with journalists.



# Advertising (Print, TV and Radio)

Some marketing tools require investment in order to reach prospective students or teachers job hunting. For example, it may be hard to place an article about your school within a popular newspaper, so paying for an advert or advertorial may be the best way to get your message across. Sponsorship is another alternative, and can help your school to become associated with other well-known brands and companies.

### Benefits

Gets your school into local publications, and in front of a larger audience. Also gives you greater creative control, as apposed to PR where the design is typically controlled by the publication.

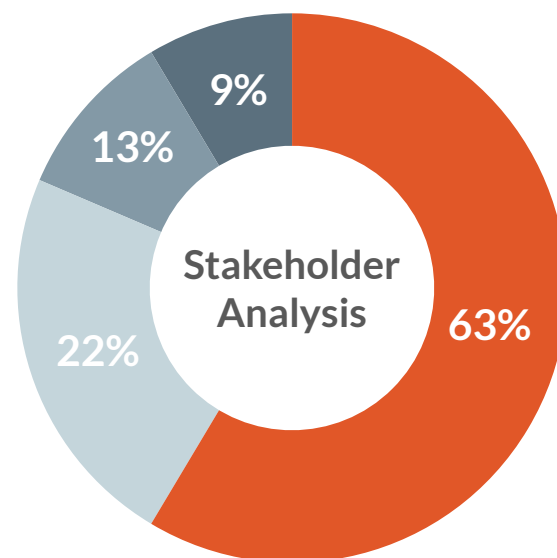
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### Limitations

Could be missed. Carrying out a stakeholder analysis prior to any marketing activity can help reduce missed opportunities with advertising.

## How advertising can be used to promote your school

Choosing the most effective advertising style for your school or academy can be tricky. Will it suit your branding? Can you easily get across all the vital information in a short radio advert, or in a small space on the page? Utilising an advert, specifically on radio or TV, can help create a more engaging experience for the viewer; something an article or prospectus can't reach.



● Students ● Parents  
● Teachers ● Governors

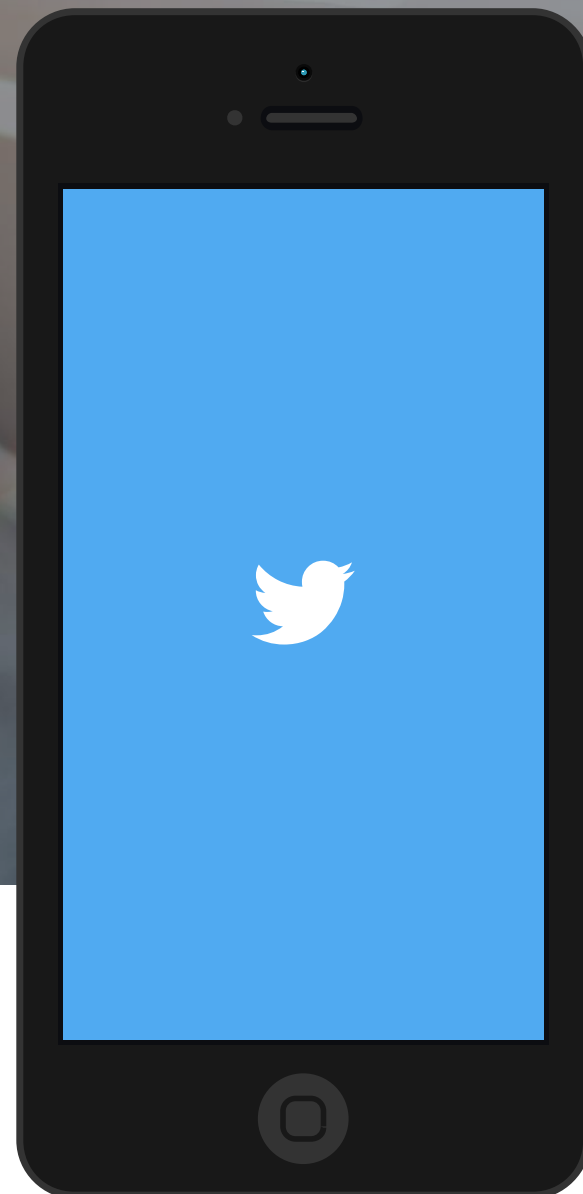


### Do you need a stakeholder analysis?

If you're looking to invest any time into marketing activity, it's best practice to employ a stakeholder analysis. This piece of research can help determine the level of interest in your school and how that involvement can influence the project. Based on the stakeholder analysis, you may alter how a your marketing project will be executed, and which marketing outlets will be the most effective.

Carrying out a stakeholder analysis can help to ascertain the level of interest of certain groups involved with your school or academy, and help you better focus your marketing efforts.





## Chapter 5: New media marketing tools

According to Ofcom, over 75% of adults in the UK have access to broadband, and 57% of the UK uses their mobile to access the Internet. 2014 is the first year where web traffic from mobile devices is greater than desktop usage. But what does this mean for your school's marketing strategy? These statistics, coupled with the requirement for every school to have a website, demonstrates the real need for an online marketing strategy. In this chapter, we will demonstrate the new media marketing tools available, and how your school can leverage success whilst utilising them.

# Social media

Any websites or apps that enable users to create and share content, or interact online, is considered social networking. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+ are popular amongst schools.

## Benefits

Easily reach a large audience, sharing images, school news and website content.

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## Limitations

Some schools may be concerned with security issues, and not all parents or students may use the social networks you use. (Planning a stakeholder analysis can help reduce this).

## How social media can be used to promote your school

Setting up a social media account for your school can help to build relationships outside of the classroom, as well as better understand your audience. Letting your students do the talking, and giving them control of your account, whilst posting about school events and successes, can help increasing admissions. It's a great idea to use images and video on social media, as they attract more attention online and add variety to your profile.



### Your school website

Following DfE and Ofsted regulations, every maintained school in the UK must have a website. However, it can also be transformed into a great resource for students, teachers and the local community. Academies and free schools also need to post specific information online, but this will differ between schools.

#### Benefits

A great resource for current students, whilst also helping to inform prospective students, Ofsted and the local community.

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#### Limitations

If not executed properly, it can be hard to access – for example, if it's not available on mobile or tablet devices.

### How your website can be used to promote your school

Your school website is one of the few marketing tools where you will have complete control. Everything from the design, structure and content can be managed by the school, and can be altered when you need to. Bearing this in mind, your website can really embody your school brand and be linked to other marketing activities – such as a Facebook or Twitter account, or any articles published in the local press.

# Sample school marketing and branding plan

**Setting up your first marketing plan needs to take into account several factors, including your competition and your audiences' perception of you school. Below we have outlined the preliminary steps you will need to take before undertaking your marketing plan, and the key aspects of your future marketing plan.**

## Preliminary marketing strategy

Assessing the current opinion of your school in the local community is a great place to start. New school? Assessing how other schools are perceived, or what parents and students are looking for, can help you establish yourself. Below are a few questions and tasks your school can undertake prior to finalising your marketing plan.



### Conduct a SWOT analysis

**Conduct a SWOT analysis** on the schools in your local community. SWOT, or 'strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats'. Establishing an opposing schools strengths and weaknesses can help your school define its brand and offering, and therefore its place in the market.



### Hold a focus group with key stakeholders

**Hold a focus group with key stakeholders** in your school and the local area to establish how they view you, and whether this matches up with your perception of yourself, and the school. If the two viewpoints don't add up, it may mean you might need to work on your external marketing to realign your brand message.



### Define your schools ethos and values

**Define your schools ethos and values**, and ensure they align with your brand message and aspirations.

### Your marketing plan

Every school is different, so rather than outline specifics in this section, we are highlighting some of the areas you should consider when completing your marketing plan.

1

**Create your executive summary.** This is the quick overview of your marketing plan, and can be used to educate those in your school about your new strategy. This can be really useful to get buy-in from key stakeholders.

2

**Define your target audience.** Are you aiming your marketing at prospective students, or their parents – or both? This may vary depending on the type of school you are, or the decisions your target audience needs to make (for example, is your school a fee paying school?)

3

**What is your unique selling point?** If your school has a subject specialism, great history or amazing facilities, it's great to highlight it in your marketing plan. Giving your school a unique edge sets it apart from other local schools and can help to focus your marketing efforts.

4

**Do you have any admissions strategy?** If your admissions process sets you apart from other schools, it's great to highlight them in your marketing plan.

5

**What are your marketing materials?** Every school in the UK has to have a website, but it doesn't need to be boring! If used properly, it can just one of your set of really effective marketing materials. Other marketing materials include your school prospectuses, and school newsletters.

6

**Do you have a promotion strategy?** How do you plan to use social media to promote your school? If you've got a public account, it won't just be your students that can see your posts, but the local community too. It's a good idea to plan any public relations strategy in advance to ensure you have enough time to promote school open days or events



### Your marketing plan

7

**Set up a conversion strategy.** It might seem like only businesses need to consider converting prospects into customers. However, setting up a 'conversion strategy' for potential students can enable your school to gain sufficient admissions, and retain students into later years – if you have a 6<sup>th</sup> form, for example. Interactive school tours and informative prospectuses can all form part of an effective conversion strategy.

8

**Establish a connection with your feeder schools, or linked universities.** Does your school have links with other schools or universities in your community? Integrating your marketing plans can not only boost your efforts, but streamline them too.

9

**Do you have any plans for marketing into the future?** It's not just about considering what will work for your school now, but also how your school might change in the future. Will you apply to become an academy, will you link with a college, or are you investing in new facilities to help the community? Planning ahead can ensure your changes in the future will match up with your marketing plan, and your students won't be confused by any changes.

### Marketing plan styles

Once you have answered the above questions, you should be in a place to start planning individual marketing activities. One style of marketing plan is known as a Gantt chart, and can be used to manage a range of projects. The chart allows users to allocate timescales to individual activities, to plan future projects.

Sample Gantt Chart	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
<i>Social Media promotion</i>					
<i>Distribute prospectuses to local schools</i>					
<i>Launch new school website</i>					
<i>Plan and host open days</i>					

# Marketing your school, long term

As your school develops a voice, an identifiable brand and a strong marketing plan, it might be time to look at investing time in other marketing activities. New social networks might become popular, or your school may have a more interactive website which might make it easier to receive online admissions. Below, we've outlined some areas you can look into, should you wish you to create a long-term marketing plan.

### Developing your current marketing plan.

As your school marketing and branding becomes more established, you may wish to add additional sources to your strategy. A school app could help your team market upcoming events to parents, whilst bringing your school onto a new platform. Your school may also want to branch out onto a new social network, bringing you to a new audience. Before you do invest time in planning out communications on a new network, it's a great idea to run a stakeholder analysis to determine whether your intended recipients use this social network. This can be conducted in the form of a focus group, or questionnaires distributed at open days.

### Integrating your marketing plan with other education providers.

In the future, you may want to team up with another school and therefore may align your marketing plans. If your school joins an academy, you may become part of a trust, who may have their own brand image that your school can integrate with. Planning a strategy meeting with the marketing manager at the other school can help to assess what activities can be integrated, and how you can work with your new partner.

### Getting the whole school involved.

Once your management team and the teachers at your school have bought in to your new marketing strategy, it may be time to involve some students too. Do you have students who are planning a degree in marketing, who are skilled in English? They may be the best students to get involved first, but it's an activity for the whole school – after all, they are some of your best assets.

### Switch from reactive to proactive marketing.

Creating a marketing plan in advance helps your school to become proactive about upcoming events, and take control of your school's brand image. Sending press releases to a newspaper before a school event or open day can help drum up interest, rather than reactively marketing the event – once it's happened. Forward planning your marketing, with a Gantt chart for example, can help you perfect your marketing messages months before your next open day.