

**Report on the 2005 Knowledge Partnership Conference
“Standing out in the Crowd: Managing reputation and Marketing”**

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Preamble

The Knowledge Partnership began in the early 1990’s and has offices in UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

There is continued change and challenge across the education sector in both policy and practice. This is happening against a backdrop of a turbulent, complex and increasingly knowledge driven society. Reputation and marketing issues for management in education institutions require a robust and high-level application

The Conference had three foci:

1. Institutional strategy and planning
2. Organising and marketing and reputation through analysis and planning
3. The student journey

A similar theme resonated through all the addresses and workshops I attended: that authenticity is paramount in our organisation, our learning programmes and our communications with stakeholders.

That there should be no gaps between what we say we are as a school, and what we do.

Messages from the Conference

Professor Frank Crowther, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Dean of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Australia, co-author of “The Entrepreneurial School” with Brian Caldwell; known internationally for his Innovative Designs for Enhanced Achievement in Schools (IDEAS), a school revitalisation programme; named one of the “smartest 100 Australians” by The Bulletin magazine in 2004.

Dr Crowther spoke on IDEAS, an initiative that encourages schools to engage in a journey of self-discovery that will ensure they achieve sustainable excellence. The project is aimed at enhancing a school’s achievements and enriching its identity. The approaches used are culture building, organisation

wide professional learning and the development of a school wide approach to pedagogy. Leadership of these knowledge-creating processes is based on shared responsibility (teacher leaders working in mutualistic relationships with the Principal and Senior Management)

Frank shared some examples with the audience: IDEAS schools that have created a meaningful alignment between school vision, community input, physical infrastructure, classroom practices and professional development.

Professor David Warner, Chief Executive Officer, Swansea Institute of Higher Education, UK has written a number of books on educational management, has organised and chaired 200 conferences and specialises in strategies for educational institutions seeking to turn around their reputation. He is famous for his successes at Swansea, which in 1997, when he was appointed was headlined in The Times as on the verge of collapse.

Some of the strategies that helped turn Swansea around:

- positive profile/regular media releases/staff encouraged to talk positively about Swansea/media remit given prominence in the organisation.
- Celebrating successes
- Profiling successful alumni
- Prompt response to enquiries/analysis of enquiries data
- Development of links with contributing schools
- Severe cost cutting/budgets trimmed
- Focus on income generation
- Strong focus on students/staff are there to support student learning
- Marketing is every ones job

Professor Warner gave an insightful perspective on how to even the game of internal politics. His observation was that an institution in trouble be it financial, falling rolls, poor student achievement etc or all of those things, **somehow every one in the institution has to accept that each person has had a part to play in the institutions down turn, and every one has a part to play in the institution's recovery.**

Robyn Walshe, Managing Director, Judy Grace Consulting, Auckland, New Zealand and is a member of the Knowledge Partnership network. Until recently Robyn was Director of Institute Relations at Unitec. She has led developments in branding and customer orientation and has research papers to the Australasian Association of Institution Research and the American Marketing Association. Her presentation was around enhancing the ways organisations deliver on their promises (for plugging the gap between promise and performance). She looked at data she has collected on student decision-making and student experiences. What gets in the way of student engagement with an institution.

Robyn found that **too often what we (the institution) say we do falls short of the actual experiences of students.**

There are a number of influences on student decision-making including parents, socio-economic status, academic achievement, costs, contributing institutions and so on. Although her data was from surveys of tertiary students much of her findings could equally apply to secondary school students.

The following are areas where poor performance can turn students off:

- The Front Desk – the receptionist must know the answers. She/he is the Director of First Impressions
- Course Descriptions – should be easily understood and jargon – free/not wordy/avoid polysyllabic sentences/use personal pronouns sometimes pictures and posters can provide a better explanation/poor spelling, typos/clear entry criteria and pass standards (students want to feel that they have striven for something worthwhile)
- Orientation must be genuine/the institution is chummy while trying to get students to enrol but unwelcoming when students enter the institution / information is impersonal and only in generic form, nothing specific / no map or an out of date map/no buddies or older students to act as mentors or supporters.
- Encounter with teachers/meaningful and friendly/don't have time fillers/contact with parents ASAP that is positive/campus wide integrated approach – no them (other faculties) and us (we are better) approach/able to verbalise the culture of the institution (break through the prejudice of departments)

Highlighted was word of mouth (positive conversations about the institution by students and parents) **positive relationships**; data collection and analysis eg student satisfaction, surveys, leavers information, value as opposed to cost, integrated culture of responsiveness as opposed to we know best; collaborative not authoritarian.

Virginia Isaac – Director of Marketing and Communications, UCAS, UK is responsible for marketing and communications, publications and distribution and raising the profile of higher education to non traditional audiences. UCAS is the central organisation that manages applications for full time undergraduate courses of UK universities and colleges. As part of this she works with secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions. She is on the Board of Cheltenham College one of the largest secondary boarding schools in the UK. Key drivers that are having a fundamental impact on educational marketing in UK:

- Change in perception of students – previously schools and tertiary providers saw them as students/do as we tell you; now they are seen as customers/our 16+ students especially do not have to be at school so they are our customers.
- Major debate in the UK is presently on whether to have marks or grades. Marks now seen as having a limiting effect and not necessarily reflecting the significance of the attainment.
- Customisation/individual learning programmes/one to one marketing. one size does not fit all. Teaching to the middle of the class as opposed to groups is no longer acceptable.

- Wooing the student to sign to your institution then ignoring them is unacceptable. The contact needs to keep going. Responses must be speedy.
- Data collation/analysis/bench marking/feedback loops/educational qualifications/socio-economic/ethnicity et al.

Conclusions

- Local marketing is just as important as overseas marketing.
- Knowing ourselves and what we represent and ensuring that is reflected in our mission, vision, values, culture, school wide pedagogy and institutional structures to ensure authenticity.
- Data collation and analysis/bench marking/evidence based approach.
- Distributive leadership/teachers as leaders.
- Responsiveness/rapport/student satisfaction levels.
- Managing reputation and marketing in the educational environment is a challenging business no matter how big or small the institution. There is no room for faking it.

Relating what I learned to our school

The Board Strategic Planning day was useful for me to measure what we discussed and reviewed in our Charter, with what I learned at the conference. I concluded that our Charter in its mission, vision, values and beliefs reflects on the whole what happens at our school.

The main thrust of our advertising, especially the slogan "She's Worth it" is reflected in what we say in our Charter and in the values and culture of the school.

I believe that we are operating at a high level of responsiveness to international student need: buddies, pastoral care, administrative needs, English language learning and international code of practice requirements are all of a high standard. Similarly visiting agents and provision of regular information about our school to agents, has improved considerably in 2004 and 2005.

What is our niche?

We need to build on our girls only environment both locally and internationally. There is much research to show that girls learn best in that environment. We could also highlight safety aspects for young women in a single sex school.

Our niche marketing should highlight the sports and cultural programmes in our school.

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Other Courses Attended

I attended the Conference for the *Alliance of Girls' Schools*

Two sessions of particular interest:

- Bullying amongst girls "Queen Bee Wanna Be"
- School wide health initiative on managing stress and establishing positive relationships. This was particularly interesting because it emphasised the need for individual and faculty team responsibility in managing stress. Rather than a blame mentality.

Emotional Intelligences and Distributive Leadership

- Research shows that the idea of the charismatic leader creating change and influencing people to do things differently through force of personality has been proven to be effective for maybe two years. There is no sustainability.
- Sustainable change is more likely to happen where there are a number of different voices all singing the same song ie distributive leadership.
- Linked to this type of leadership is courageous conversations

Conclusions

- Through [A@W](#) steering Committee (a cluster of Waitakere City Secondary Schools) we have begun to seed the idea of school wide pedagogy focused on literacy and numeracy strategies and differentiated learning. A school culture that is student focused now predominates at Kelston Girls' College. In 2006 Senior Management plan at Kelston Girls' College professional development in distributive leadership.

Linda Fox
PRINCIPAL