

"Your School's Image: Its impact on...well, *everything*" by David Wagner



Developing your school's image or reputation is similar to cultivating the customer and securing the sale in a business setting. The

greatest cost is in developing the relationship and securing the customer. You want to protect that image or relationship as it only becomes costly again when you lose it and have to rebuild it or create another.

I recall a superintendent who fired a very popular high school principal for an unfounded reason. The students protested for days. Some refused to return to school. The principal held an assembly to tell the students to go back to class and let him fight his battle. The school made no attempt to influence the negative publicity during the incident which resulted in media coverage of only student protests, teacher's testimonies and interviews with the principal (who would speak). Because of this, the school developed an extremely poor reputation. The principal was portrayed as a victim saint. The school was depicted as scandalous and silent.

Think about your school's image. How was it developed, how do you protect it or in some cases, how do you change it? Let's take a look at each of these areas.

How is image developed? Image or reputation comes from the experiences of the school's stakeholders – its parents, students, teachers, pastors, church members, donors, neighbors, community members and the media. Their experiences range from the academic quality of the education, overall deportment of the student body, the perceived "value" of the private school education to the treatment of the students, parents and staff.

Image is developed from the school's messaging. It comes from how the school describes and promotes its academic, biblical and world view standards. The school's activities and the types of events it sponsors and emphasizes and its community involvement all frame the message of the school.

Image is developed from conversation that takes place in the media about the school. It includes conversation in print, radio television, blogs or other social media outlets. What is the media saying about your school – is it good, bad or do they even know you exist?

How is image protected? Image or reputation is like fine china – it takes time and skill to carefully create and craft; it must be handled carefully, and it can easily be broken. There are three main building blocks in the foundation of protecting image and reputation: integrity, transparency and engagement.

Integrity means truthfulness. It means you will be accurate in presenting information about your school in your advertising, newsletters to parents and friends and in the use of adjectives when you talk about your accomplishments (biggest, best, most...). It means you will be honest when test scores need to rise; you will talk about what you are going to do to raise admission standards if needed. It is easier to be truthful when you first discuss a topic and move forward than it is to go back and correct a misstatement. Separate fact and faith, and specify which it is. Admit mistakes; it shows you are human, and it also shows you are diligent and trustworthy.

Transparency means openness. It means you will be open to sharing important and relevant information with your stakeholders. Transparency has become a "buzzword" in today's world. When it appears someone is trying to hide something most often they are. Information will be sought. A story will be told – either one that you tell, or one told by another with the information they have or perceptions they have formed. In some cases the one told by another is the media and it may not represent what is accurate because the school has not been transparent in giving information.



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We live in a world of text messages being sent from staff meetings, "on-the-spot" tweets from chapel, Facebook messages and blogs. Your communication must be open, but it also must be early and at times prior to having all answers ready or changes implemented to remedy a situation. Transparency can shine light on issues and help your school get better – and, it is the right thing to do.

Engagement means conversation and involvement. It means your stakeholders are engaged with the school, giving input, receiving important information, being heard and even involved in certain decisions. Gone are the days when the "let the administration handle that" sentiment prevailed; today's parents want to be informed, if not involved.

Information can lead to appropriate and supportive engagement. Engagement can lead to ownership and support on boards or committees. Convene diverse stakeholder groups and learn their concerns and issues. Respond appropriately, and report the progress back to the stakeholders. Establish trust with stakeholders, in part with the accuracy of the information that you provide. When an issue arises, engage with speed and clarity, and if appropriate, with a bit of humility.

How is image changed? It takes time, effort, strategic initiatives and resources to change image and reputation. Image can be changed from neutral or negative to positive; trust in the school, its leadership and faculty can be built or re-

built; a broader local and regional awareness of the school's mission can be formed; student enrollment can be restored and increased; and donor support and be restored and increased.

In addition to implementing the building blocks of integrity, transparency and engagement, several tools are readily available to help with this change. They are: media, community, internal and stakeholder relations.



Earned media, or positive news coverage you actively work to get, is effective in communicating with a broad group of stakeholders and shaping their perceptions about your school. Strategic meetings with the editorial board of the local newspaper not only provide for introductions, but display a desire for transparency and present an opportunity for administration to provide the media with accurate information. These meetings can also be used to set the stage for an announcement for new construction, expansion of classrooms or a reduction of grades. Op-ed print pieces and radio and television interviews can also be platforms to help change the image of the school.

Neglect not internal relations. Build relationships with students through physical presence throughout the school and at its activities and through listening sessions over pizza in the cafeteria. Value relationships with faculty and staff and work to "let your actions speak so loud they can't hear what you are saying." Send them birthday cards, stop for unscheduled visits to chat and be truly interested in them and their lives outside of the classroom.

Using the tool of proactive external stakeholder relations can yield clear

results. Before and after-school walkabouts in the hallways and parking lot, an open-door attitude and prompt response to e-mails and telephone calls builds relationship with parents.

An administrative presence at homecoming or other events where alumni are present, scheduled alumni update luncheons or dinners and consistent communication with opportunities for Q & A will engage your alumni and turn them into a sales staff for the school. Regularly communicate with donors, and not only at times of solicitation. Provide updates on the school, accomplishments and awards as well as needs. Provide opportunities for donor engagement and be quick to honor and recognize their involvement.

Experience continually adds depth and refinement to the academic preparation and professional training of an educator.

"Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice"
(Prov. 13:10 NIV).

As a believer, numerous passages in Proverbs remind us to ask Him for, and seek, wisdom and understanding in our daily lives. And, we are challenged to seek counsel from others – "Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice" (Proverbs 13:10 NIV).

Just as schools occasionally call in legal counsel for a legal matter and accountants for an audit or review of financial practices, public relations professionals should be considered for issues affecting the development, protection or change of the school's image. From embarking on an ambitious building or fundraising program to re-shaping the community's perception of the school from one that serves the needs of a single church to a school that reaches across many church lines, public relations can play a vital part.



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A proactive approach to public relations is much more significant and impacting than that of a reactive role in crisis situations.

While many of the practices of good public relations are already in operation in our schools, administration is often unaware of the counsel, tools and value public relations professionals offer to help sharpen the focus on delivering the mission of the school.

Your school's image does impact...well, everything. Treat it like a fine china gift – one given by God.

David Wagner has previously served as principal of Abundant Life Christian School, Chairman of the Board of ORUEF and Vice President for University Relations and Development at Oral Roberts University. He currently serves as a senior vice president at Schanke Turnbo Frank | PR, an Oklahoma based public relations firm with offices in Tulsa and Oklahoma City and can be reached at dwagner@stfpr.com or 918-582-9151.

To Tweet or Not To Tweet

The Power and Peril of a Social Media Presence

by Jeremy Burton, Director of Public Relations, Oral Roberts University

A few years back, I needed to get in touch with an Oral Roberts University student for a newspaper interview I was setting up. I obtained the student's phone number in the morning and left her a message. After patiently waiting until the afternoon, I left another message.

The next day I thought I would send her a Facebook message as an alternate way to reach out. I was amazed at what happened. Within 15 minutes, I received a response back.

Social media has changed the core of how we communicate. Especially with younger generations, it seems letters and even phone calls have become as old school as the telegraph. Tweet, friend, follow, like and other terms have crept into our daily vocabulary. All organizations, including Christian schools, should ask themselves if they should have a presence in these spaces and, if so, to what extent.



What is Social Media?

Brian Solis, a thought leader in new media, describes social media on his blog as "Any tool or service that uses the internet to facilitate conversations." Where traditional communication broadcasts a message, social media allows for constant two-way communication.



The most prominent examples of this are Facebook and Twitter. You have students (and a number of parents) that are on Facebook throughout the day sharing their thoughts and information. Other examples include Myspace, YouTube, Vimeo, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Wikipedia and blogs. This mix of social media vehicles will change over time, but the interaction will always remain.

Should Your School Dive In?

With all of these tools available, should your school have a presence in social media? The answer is in your customers and long term goals. Take a look at your students and their parents and determine how they like to get information. Depending on your school size, you could just ask around or send out a survey. See if your prospective students, parents or donors are engaged in social media. This could help you to grow your school enrollment and raise money for programs and buildings.

I think after a little searching you will discover the need to get engaged in this new media. Schools need to have a Facebook page for their organization at the least. There is a chance a motivated parent or student has already created this for you. If that is the case, you may contact them about transferring the account or helping post information.

The Power

Getting in the social media sphere can give you a powerful tool for your communications toolbox. These platforms provide a quick way to talk with your parents, students and employees. Many people have their Facebook and Twitter accounts tied to their phones. As soon as you hit send, they will get the information even if they are not at their computer. Every school feels the squeeze on their budget in this economy. A huge benefit to your organization is most of the social media activities are free. It costs you nothing to set up an official page on Facebook or a Twitter account. YouTube is a fantastic way to post video for everyone to see free of charge. Embedding a blog into your home page allows you to update information without additional IT costs.

I think most schools will find this way of communicating incredibly effective. People seem to be much more responsive

"To Tweet or Not To Tweet" continued from page 3

to messages sent out via social media. You will especially see the results when you ask people to share their thoughts or be a part of an event.

The Peril

The biggest hesitation that I hear from most organizations, especially Christian organizations, is the threat of negative comments. When you establish yourself on Facebook, Twitter, etc., you do open up your school to sometimes harsh, unfiltered comments. I understand how that could strike fear in the hearts of school administrators and teachers alike. I believe that if you approach it in the right way, you can turn any of these comments into a positive for your organization.

There are three ways you can deal with negative comments on social media. You can respond in a positive way and clear up any misinformation. Secondly, sometimes the best route to take is ignore it all together. Lastly, especially on Facebook, you have the ability to delete posts and ban users if necessary.

You should know that people are talking about your brand in social media now. Some comments are valid and some are not. Being engaged in the process allows you hear what is being said, recognize if it is a customer service opportunity, and possibly reshape those opinions of your school.

On a side note, I want to encourage all of you to talk to the young people in your school about the importance of their digital footprint. Everything that they post online—the good and the bad—will have a long shelf life. With the push of a button they can publish a picture or comment that could have unforeseen consequences. Encourage your students to use discretion and discernment on all social media platforms.

Another big hurdle in a school joining the social media bandwagon is simply a matter of not having the human resources. It is necessary to put someone on point at your organization to monitor Facebook and Twitter and be responsive. An office assistant or even a trusted volunteer that can check your social media accounts on a regular basis is all you need. The benefits of building your brand on social media far outweigh the risks. I would encourage all schools to give it a try.

Put Your Toe In

If you have decided that you would like to test out the waters of social media for your school, I would encourage you to take two first steps. First, set up your own personal Facebook and/or Twitter account if you don't already have one. Second, set up an official page for your school on Facebook.

Some of you are already beyond these steps. If so, I want to encourage you to wade out a little deeper. Think outside the box on what would help your school go above and beyond their goals. Integrate the use of Facebook in the classroom, offer an incentive to the "mayor" of your school on Foursquare, host a YouTube video contest for your students to say what they love about their school, have your principals create blogs to keep parents up to date—the list is endless and as technology changes, more will be possible.



Share your thoughts with me about social media and how your school is using it on my blog at www.jeremy-burton.blogspot.com/. You can also follow me on Twitter at twitter.com/jeremyburton.

NEW SCHOOLS ADDED

We would like to extend a warm welcome to the following schools that have joined as new members.

ORUEF

Christian Chapel Academy
Columbia, Missouri

ORUEF/ICAA

ACADEMIA BILINGUE SHALOM
San Pedro Sula, Honduras

FAITH INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
Chennai, India

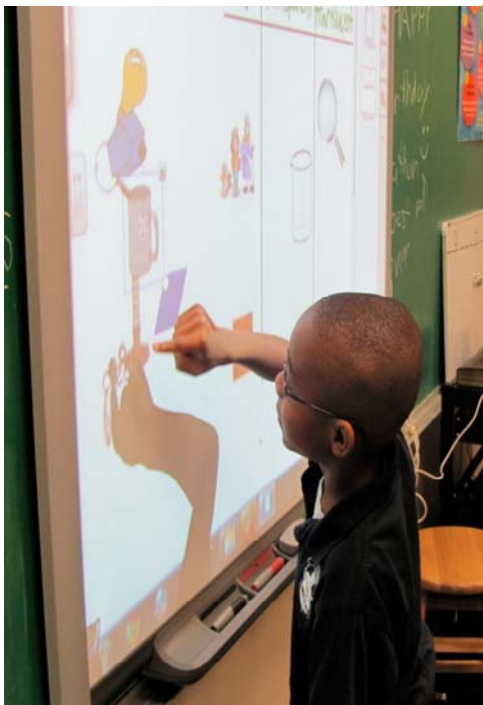
FOUNTAIN OF LIGHT CHRISTIAN ACADEMY
San Pedro Sula, Honduras

STEVENS POINT CHRISTIAN ACADEMY
Stevens Point, Wisconsin

SUMMIT CHRISTIAN ACADEMY
East Lansing, Michigan

ICAA School News featuring. . .

Bethany Christian School; Baker, LA



5th Graders Win Video Contest!

**By: Mrs. Louisa Hodges
5th Grade Teacher**

Breaking News! The fifth grade class wrote a script, recorded video clips, and produced a short 3-minute film about recycling. The video was entered into a video contest at the LACUE (Louisiana Computer Using Educators) conference this December. The students were awarded for best social/ civic video in the elementary category. There were over 100 videos submitted from across the state of Louisiana. The fifth graders won a total of two-hundred dollars to purchase more flip video cameras for the school. They will be rewarded with a pizza party in January. Congratulations and thanks fifth graders for your hard work and creativity. The video can be viewed on our Facebook page. Remember to join our 5th graders in their recycling efforts by recycling at home.

*reprinted with permission from Bethany Christian School

Fun Semester for BCS 6th Graders!

**By: Ms. Kathy Moise
Secondary Supervisor**

Congratulations!

Congratulations to 11 BCS students who have been selected to participate in a science fair program coordinated by LSU chemical engineering professor, Dr. Mike Benton. During this program, students will develop their science fair projects while being mentored by Dr. Benton and by LSU chemical engineering students.

Project-Based Learning

This year, BCS has incorporated project-based learning in the science curriculum. Students have enjoyed learning through hands-on activities. Junior High students have especially enjoyed the joint projects that have allowed them to be mentored by high school students.



If your school has celebrated an achievement, whether in sports, academics, community service, or some other area, please send us the information along with pictures so we can celebrate with you and share your accomplishment with our other schools.

Please submit any articles and pictures to Janna Pyle at japyle@oru.edu.

CONFERENCE UPDATES ...

ORUEF Regional Christian School Conference - Albuquerque, New Mexico



The ORUEF Regional Conference was held on December 3rd in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Several schools were in attendance. Dr. Pat Otto, Dr. Calvin Roso, and Fran Fern from Calvary Christian Academy provided excellent educational and motivational information for those in attendance. The day also provided many opportunities for fellowship and networking. Lance Miller, from the ORU School of Education - Graduate School, provided information about the Graduate Program at ORU.

Dr. Otto began the day with a challenge to understand the importance of our Mission which should be built on wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Dr. Otto, Dr. Roso and Fran Fern each presented two workshops to motivate, encourage and equip the PK-12 educators. Dr. Peal led a round table discussion for administrators. Dr. Roso ended the day with an encouragement to focus on what God has called us to do in Christian Education. The ORUEF Regional Conference was a blessing to all in attendance and very successful.



Is your school honoring those students who have outstanding Christian character, displays leadership abilities, seeks to fulfill their potential in their studies and has a heart to serve Jesus Christ? If not, why not consider the CHSA program.

The CHSA program is open to all schools who are members of ORUEF and is designed to recognize students in the 9th-12th grade who demonstrate Christian character, leadership, scholarship, and service. Participating schools hold an Induction Ceremony during the school year where each student member is presented a certificate. Each new member receives a CHSA pin and CHSA graduating seniors also receive a special seal for their diplomas.

Each school that participates in the CHSA program is invited to participate in the Theme Project Competition. The school selects a theme project toward which the group concentrates its efforts for the year. It may be one theme that is carried out through multiple projects or it can focus toward one specific project. At the end of the year, each school will submit their project to the ORUEF/ICAA office. Each project will be showcased at the annual Awards Banquet. The schools will be judged and those that place first, second, or third, receive an award that is presented during the program at the banquet.

We would like to encourage each school to participate in the CHSA program which advances Christian scholarship, challenges Christian leadership, honors Christian character, and stimulates Christian service.



**If you would like to contribute
articles to this newsletter,
please contact Janna Pyle
at 918.493.8880 or japyle@oru.edu.**

staying connected

www.oruef.oru.edu

www.icaa.us

Check us out on Facebook: ORUEF/ICAA

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

2011 CALENDAR

JANUARY 14 (Friday)

ORUEF Regional Christian School Conference
Calvary Christian Academy - Fort Worth, Texas

FEBRUARY 10 - 11 (Thursday - Friday)

ORUEF Latin America Christian School Conference;
Agape Christian Academy - San Pedro Sula, Honduras

FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 1 (Mon. - Tues.)

ORUEF International Christian School Conferences;
Word of Faith School - Benin City, Nigeria

MARCH 3-4 (Thursday-Friday)

ORUEF International Christian School Conference
Life International School - Tema, Ghana

JUNE 26 (Sunday)

ORUEF/ICAA Joint Board of Directors Meeting;
Tulsa, Oklahoma

JUNE 27-28, (Monday - Tuesday)

ICAA Annual Hearings & Business Meeting; - Tulsa, OK

JUNE 29 - 30 (Wednesday - Thursday)

ICAA/AdvancED Training - Tulsa, OK
(June 29: Chairman & Schools - June 30: Chairman)

JUNE 30 (Thursday):

ORUEF/ICAA Banquet; CityPlex Towers, Tulsa, Oklahoma

SEPTEMBER 12-13 (Monday - Tuesday)

ICAA Standards Training - Tulsa, OK

SEPTEMBER 30

ORUEF/ICAA Annual Renewals Due

OCTOBER 21 (Friday)

ORUEF Regional Educator's Conference
Faith Christian Academy; El Paso, TX

OCTOBER 31

ICAA Annual Report due (Accredited Schools)

NOVEMBER 3-4 (Thursday - Friday)

ORUEF/ACTS Educator's Conference
Location TBA; Orlando, FL

NOVEMBER 9 (Wednesday)

ORUEF/ICAA Board of Directors Meeting
Calvary Christian Academy; Fort Worth, TX

NOVEMBER 10-11 (Thurs. - Friday) (tentative)

ORUEF/ACTS Educator's Conference
Calvary Christian Academy; Fort Worth, TX

DECEMBER 2 (Friday)

ORUEF Early Childhood Educator's Conference
Albuquerque Hilton; Albuquerque, NM

2012 CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 16-17 (Thursday - Friday)

ORUEF/ACTS Latin America Educator's Conference
Josue Christian School; San Salvador, El Salvador

MARCH (Thursday - Friday) (tentative)

ORUEF/ACTS Mid-Atlantic Educator's Conference
Location: TBA (Virginia)

APRIL 12-13 (Thursday - Friday)

ORUEF Mexico Educator's Conference
Location TBA

JUNE 24 (Sunday)

ORUEF/ICAA Joint Board of Directors Meeting
Tulsa, OK

JUNE 25-26 (Monday Tuesday)

ICAA Annual Hearings and Meetings; Tulsa, OK

JUNE 27-28 (Wednesday - Thursday)

ORUEF International Educator's Conference

JUNE 28 (Thursday)

ORUEF/ICAA Banquet; Tulsa, OK

'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity ; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand.' Ezekiel 33:6

You are the Watchman!!!

- > The school mission directly reflects a specific “Call” from God.
- > God will provide ways for us to do what He has called us to do!!
- > The provision comes as a result of faithful adherence to the mission that God gave us. (Intentionally focused, obedient, hard work over time)

*Excerpts taken from Dr. J. Patrick Otto’s General Session entitled “The Importance Of Mission” as presented to the ORUEF Regional Christian School Conference in Albuquerque, NM.

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