



A mirror – reflecting on ISC2008

We were one of the exhibitors at the ISC Marketing 2008. It was an early start. I think I arrived at the Russell Hotel at 6.45 am!

But in the frenzied excitement of the day, meeting friends, colleagues, attending the stimulating seminars, our effectiveness in reaching those who were interested in knowing more about JWA might have become eclipsed!

JWA is a small, but well-established, successful design company, that likes to see itself as a mirror! Why, you may ask, should we identify ourselves with a mirror?

Quite simply, we at JWA see our primary task is to design prospectuses that not only inspire the reader, but also accurately reflect the life and spirit of each school, and in doing so, aim to make the difference.

There is a well-tried exercise to test the accuracy of any prospectus and that is to exchange the name on the cover for another school. If the prospectus still works, (and there's a very good chance it will!) then the prospectus designer has failed to understand his brief.

We frequently discover that many design companies have a stronger sales team than they do design team, and their products can suffer from being clones, failing to differentiate one school from another! The implication of a prospectus that does not effectively expose the true benefits of a particular school has profound repercussions. It is both misleading for the parents; a disservice to the school and not cost-effective.

Many believe that today the real marketing for a school is achieved by the web site. We of course believe this to be too simplistic. The web site needs to work in conjunction with and be complimentary to the prospectus. The prospectus provides a quality, tactile insight to the school, whereas the website provides detailed and up to the minute information. A good web site can complement a good prospectus, especially if their design is well coordinated.

Every school is different. It serves distinct target groups, and inevitably every school has its own character and profile. We see it as a major part of our brief to find what makes each school distinctive. The objective of many schools could be shared, empowering the child to discover his potential and the value of community. But it is the different ways schools choose to undertake the educational process, which distinguishes one from another. Yet, too many prospectuses look the same, a criticism levelled to me only last month when a friend of mine had worked his way through a pile of prospectuses, looking for a suitable school for his son. Parents and children need to be able to make informed choices.

We are convinced that it takes quite a degree of understanding before you can design a prospectus that honestly reflects a particular school. A charming marketing lady told me she thought she would like to see page layouts/style sheets of a school prospectus before she would appoint a design company. This is a little premature. It is unrealistic, in my opinion, to hypothetically work up a design until you are familiar with the life and spirit of a school. We don't do it. Informed design solutions can only be arrived at through relevant knowledge of the school. Therefore I find it counterproductive that so many prospectuses are marketed by style rather than content! We suggest that it is preferable to inspect the design company's portfolio and then check with the school, to confirm how successful the publication has been.

For marketing to be effective, it is essential to convey the real benefits, distinct purpose and vision of each school in the prospectus, if it is going to have any impact on an informed decision making process. In fact, in this economic downturn, to avoid miss-understandings, it is important to communicate the ethos and objectives of a school as accurately as possible.

In the bustle of manning our stand at ISC 2008 this is difficult material to discuss, but it may help you understand why we are here again! Schools are as exciting, dynamic and individual as the people in them and the objective to convey that will remain the challenge.

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