



## Tough times – how should a school’s marketing respond?

There is no question that the squeeze will impact on us all in some way.

But education at school is a vital ingredient in a child’s development and parents will be reluctant to compromise on doing the best for their child.

How do schools respond in a culture of rising costs?

It is my opinion that there are two approaches which both have currency.

The first is not to compromise on quality because excellence will always appeal; the second is to exercise a conscious policy of prudence.

Put simply, in two words:

Spend wisely!

Excellence will always appeal. I remember many years ago being involved in the promotion of Milton Keynes New City. The vision for a City of that scale had to be long term and yes there were downturns in the economy, but the evolution of that City was in excess of 25 years. When a recession occurred the vision was not compromised because projected recessions were built into the original financial projection, on the assumption that the pendulum would swing. Today, in spite of a few cynics, Milton Keynes can claim to be one of Britain’s most successful New Towns, not least, because the stakeholders didn’t loose their nerve in lean times.

Similarly, a child’s education can take around 20 years before a student has completed his/her University education. It would be a sad day if parents withdrew their children from an excellent school because of a financial squeeze.

Parents have only one chance to expose their children to the education system and most want the best for their children. Each school has its own unique skills and atmosphere. Inevitably there are schools which might not suit some children, whereas, others might be a perfect match for their child’s character and academic skills to grow.

It is important for parents with their children to discover what schools have to offer, and what makes each school special. It is vital that the prospectus has grasped the

unique flavour of the school. It is the subtle differences that can make one school appropriate for one child and less beneficial for another. One school we were involved with had been perceived as being a 'hot house'. But on further scrutiny, in fact, it was not only highly academic but offered a wide scope of activities, including overseas visits, exceptional music and arts facilities, furthermore the girls were having a great time and were not highly stressed. Other schools may have a bias towards sport or debating/drama. Some schools have majored on languages, whereas others have built a reputation for IT and DT.

It's implicit on the prospectus/web designer to tease out these qualities so the process of choice for both parents and children is made easier. It's not ideal for children to change schools because the information given proved inadequate or misleading. A quality production does not mean lavish, but it needs to be informative, it needs to convey the spirit of care and give a clear idea of what the school's objectives. Compelling text and well observed, engaging photography could convey the unique character of the school. The information this prospectus provides should enable the reader to distinguish it from other schools.

Yet superficial solutions to prospectus design continue to flourish!!

We hear of too many school Governors, and marketing departments who continue to be seduced by design groups who are prepared to offer free pitching. A practise where "quick fix" solutions are tabled in the belief 'that will do!' What I fail to understand is why perceptive stakeholders are driven by such an unprofessional practise. How can a superficial, pitch solution represent an in-depth understanding of a complex institution? Yet, free pitching and the 'that will do' ethos abounds in this industry and regularly win contracts. May be, that's why, as one head said to me, "so many prospectuses look identical!"

In our experience, it is not until you have a good understanding of a school that you are in a position to make an informed proposal on how a design solution for branding or a prospectus might work. All of our clients have exercised their choice of Design Company on the quality of solutions we have evolved for other clients. Our

prospectuses reflect the life and spirit of each school they promote, it's because every school has its own distinct character that our design solutions are all different.

Spend wisely; it costs no more to do things well than it does to do them badly.

In this period of tough times we owe it to the parents to make informed choices, we at JWALTD would like to be a part of that process.

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