

## **Marketing Your School in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by Karen Spring**

This guide is meant to help you market your school and AMS Montessori education. The 21<sup>st</sup> century presents new challenges and new opportunities that, when acted upon, can help you achieve your objectives. It doesn't matter whether you are a big school or a small school. It doesn't matter whether you offer programs through middle school or through preschool. What matters is that you stand out from your competition in a positive way.

### **Step One: Understand Your Consumers**

Consumers can include current parents, prospective parents, donors, trustees, faculty, staff, and community at large. You can survey different constituencies with simple questions that help you evaluate how your school is perceived. Find out about consumers attitudes and perceptions of your school. Attitudes describe how consumers' think about your school and perceptions tell you how consumers feel about your school. This information is important to understanding the "image" your school has in your community.

Also understand the mindset that today's consumers possess in the 21st Century. A few important considerations for planning are:

- Consumers are more savvy and sophisticated when selecting a school. They benefit from all the information they obtain on-line and often review and decide before they even visit your school! This limits face-to-face interaction and requires your communication to be of high-production value, as well as clear and concise, to stand out from the competition. These "savvy consumers" should have an easier time understanding the AMS Montessori philosophy!
- Parents want to hear what your school has to offer their family. Focus your communication on the benefits you offer them vs. the features of your school. Consumers care more if you tell them that their children are going to become technically proficient by using laptops everyday than if you tell them that the school owns 50 laptops!
- We live in such an uncertain world that your consumers need certainty! The AMS Montessori philosophy provides consumers with firm principles and values and gives consumers a feeling of being a part of a safe haven.
- Be careful how you communicate the whole person development attribute of the AMS Montessori philosophy. Some schools are tackling social issues in an age-inappropriate way and we don't want to be lumped into that grouping. We are developmental specialists and approach character development in a very positive way. Use the example of "markers".

### **Step Two: Speak in a Shared Voice!**

Parents-Teachers-Prospective Teachers-Donors-Trustees

Ask Your Voice questions! Gather your group together at an in-service and brainstorm with fun exercises:

1. What is uniquely different about our school?
2. How would you explain what we do and why we do it?
3. Why would someone select our school over others?
4. What benefits do we offer families?
5. Could their needs be met in other ways?
6. How could our school serve them better?

### **Step Three: Write Strategic Objectives**

Write strategic objectives for your school. Are you more focused on increasing enrollment or maintaining current families? Where do you want to be in 5 years?

### **Step Four: Gather Consensus**

Gather consensus from Trustees and faculty about strategic direction and research learning. Agree on your unique points of difference.

### **Step Five: Develop a Language**

Develop a language that conveys core philosophical messages of the AMS Montessori philosophy. Provide an understanding of how your school embraces AMS Montessori philosophy. You are trying to sell AMS Montessori philosophy as a category and your school as the brand.

The Montessori in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century video can communicate language in an engaging, memorable way and showcase the AMS Montessori environments and faculty-practicing philosophy.

## **Uses of Video**

**Educate teachers, Trustees, and volunteers to speak intelligently to parents/community. Show the video to them and encourage discussion. This can take place at faculty/staff workshops, and in-service days. The questions can be asked at the same in-service following seeing the video. The faculty and staff could look at ways that your school is differentiated in the Montessori community. Ensure they know never to compare openly to other independent schools when speaking to parents and other members of your community. Inform them at the meeting of your expectation that they will attempt to utilize this language in their conferences and other interactions with community.**

Educate parents and motivate them to stay at school. Use the video in many of your meetings with parents and you will see a difference in their understanding. Parent Orientation meetings, meetings when the child is moving up a level, back to school nights, parent conferences and volunteer meetings are examples when the video can be shown to help educate. Underscore the key messages following the viewing of the video.

Educate prospective parents on Montessori education to stimulate enrollment. The video can kick-off your open house or a school tour. It can be shown in parent education classes if they are offered at your school.

Solicit teachers to take training by showing the video at training center open houses, classes, and perhaps set up a TV/VCR at college fairs!

## **Step Seven: Plan Marketing Activities**

Communicate language through marketing activities. Ensure your communication is benefit-oriented. The tone of materials should reflect your school. Marketing activities consist of:

- Communication materials
- Press releases
- Faculty development
- Advertising
- Outreach activities

While your marketing plan will be based on your budget and internal resources, your language is the most important component for building a strong image for your school.