

Marketing: making the right appointment



When it comes to appointing a deputy head, a bursar or a head of modern languages, most schools know exactly how to go about it.

The parameters of the job may differ from school to school. The extent of involvement required in other school activities may vary. By and large, though, schools know what they want and know how to recognise the professional and personal qualities which will make a successful appointment.

But when it comes to appointing a director of marketing – as more and more schools are doing – there's no such fund of received wisdom. Most schools don't know what to look for, what constitutes a successful record in commercial marketing, don't even recognise what the job titles signify.

And, fatally, many are torn between a desire to find someone who "understands what schools are about" and a half-hearted resolve to appoint an out-and-out marketer who will challenge the cosy complacency of staff and governors about promoting the school.

Therefore, finding somebody with the right background can prove difficult. With a lower staff turnover rate than other industries, a candidate with marketing experience gained in other independent schools may prove hard to come by, while somebody who has achieved well in commercial or public enterprise may not prove attuned to the idiosyncrasies of the sector.

So the recent past is littered with the casualties, schools as well as individuals, of ill-advised marketing appointments. At a time like the present, when getting your marketing right is essential, you don't want to be adding to that list.

Here are some fundamental questions to ask and answer to ensure that your marketing appointment is an appropriate and successful one:

- Full-time or part-time? A good case could be made for a full-time marketing appointment in every school but if your budget will only stretch to part-time, remember that no-one can do the job successfully in less than three days a week.
- 38 weeks or 48 weeks? Much of a marketer's most important work will be done out of term time and the contract – and the rewards package – should reflect that.
- How's your sales department? The work of even the most gifted marketer will be wasted unless there is a seamless rapport with the sales (ie admissions) process.
- How big is the job? Does it include responsibility for the admissions process too?
- Internal or external? If you appoint an enthusiastic member of staff, remember they may need training. Marketing is a professional discipline, not a job for a dilettante or a keen part-timer.
- SMT or not SMT? Ultimately the success, even the survival, of your school will depend on how good your marketing is. That importance should be reflected in the management seniority of the marketing director.
- Do you know where to find marketers? Where do they look for jobs when they want promotion or for a new challenge?
- Who will be your flannel detector? Do you have a governor with marketing experience to help you make the appointment or do you need an expert adviser?
- What about support and review? Should you consider an external marketing audit before and after you appoint your candidate, or on-the-job support and guidance to ensure progress is being made?

mtmconsulting has years of experience of advising schools on making marketing appointments, and helping to support them afterwards.

For more information, contact Joe Faulkner (01502 722787; jfaulkner@mtmconsulting.co.uk)

Understanding the ins...

Do you have a clear idea of the reasons parents chose your school over your competitors? What about their hopes for their son or daughter during their education at your school? How can you make sure your parents feel valued when they arrive?

...and the outs...

Meanwhile what about those parents whose children have come to the end of their time at your school? Did you succeed in meeting their expectations? How satisfied are they that you offered first class education and value for money? What, in their eyes, does your school do well and what could you do better?

of your parents' perceptions

mtmconsulting's entry and exit surveys are the best way to answer these questions. Our clients find that conducting a swift online survey of their new parents each year helps them to build a really comprehensive understanding of what parents are looking for from your school, which others they considered, and why they opted for your school.

In the same way, there is huge value in listening to parents who have experienced education at your school. These parents have unique insight into life at your school and can offer you invaluable feedback to help you to improve the quality of education you offer.

All mtmconsulting surveys are simple to complete via a secure weblink and are customised for your school. We supply template letters inviting parents to participate and can design the questions to suit your needs. Surveys can take just four weeks from commissioning to receiving a comprehensive feedback report including trends, statistics and verbatim quotes where appropriate.

Online entry surveys are typically best carried out early in the Autumn term, and exit surveys during the Summer term.

For more information contact Joe Faulkner on 01502 722787 or jfaulkner@mtmconsulting.co.uk

DON'T MISS the most important school business conference of the year

There are just a few places left for **Practical Strategies for Challenging Times**, the fourth annual strategy conference organised by mtmconsulting and Veale Wasbrough Lawyers.

The conference is a must for all school leaders and decision-makers: heads, bursars, governors and marketers.

Speakers at this year's conference include:

- Sir David Bell, Chair of Council, Roehampton University and Director of Pearson, the world's largest educational publisher
- Robert Fletcher, Former Director, Saatchi New York
- Anastasia de Waal, Director of Family & Education, Civitas
- John MacGregor, Head of Specialised Commercial Banking, Coutts & Co
- Charles Robinson, Director of Strategic Development, Cognita

Practical seminar sessions on:

- Business strategies in a cold climate
- Maximising your assets
- Fees and affordability
- Managing cash flow
- Controlling costs
- Public benefit and public relations

Practical Strategies for Challenging Times

Tuesday 15th September Institute of Directors, Pall Mall, London SW1
Contact: office@mtmconsulting.co.uk or call 01502 722787

Charting a safe course to 2020

An mtmconsulting seminar

Coutts Bank, 440 Strand, London WC2

10am Friday 13th November

Taking the *mtmconsulting Independent Education Sector 2010 Report* as starting point, expert speakers will identify the key education, financial and marketing issues to see independent schools safely through the next decade.

Speakers include Nigel Richardson, Former Chairman of HMC, Nigel Noble, AGBIS Training Officer, and Melanie Tucker, mtmconsulting Principal.

Seminar fee £155 (including lunch)

Limited availability so book your place now!

Contact Barbara Badrick on 01502 722787 or office@mtmconsulting.co.uk

mtm SCHOOL MATTERS

SEPTEMBER 2009

Tigger's route through the recession

mtmconsulting's principal, Melanie Tucker, gives her personal tips for ensuring your school safely navigates the rough seas ahead.

Recent years have seen a big rise in interest in demography in the independent sector, as schools seek to understand their potential market in the years ahead.

Nothing wrong with that – it is a major factor to be considered. But the inescapable fact is that it's the state of the economy that has the greatest impact on recruitment. When the economy is doing well, independent schools tend to do well, and when it declines, so do independent school numbers.

If we look back to the last economic downturn in the early 90s, the statistics show that independent school numbers declined about two years later. If a similar pattern occurs this time round, then the sector is most likely to feel the full impact in September 2010 and 2011.

In this climate, there are some key aspects to address to ensure that your school business model is as robust as possible. In times of growth it might just be possible to glide over some weaknesses, but economic downturn has a uncanny knack of exposing poor business habits.

You may be lucky enough to be an 'enrolling school' – your biggest problem is managing the demand, but it's much more likely that you are a 'recruiting school' where you have to work very hard for every pupil. Whatever the starting point, no-one can be complacent. Here, we offer a few pointers to consider to ensure a sound framework for the rocky times ahead. Much of this is common sense, but...

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Also in this issue

Bounceback – but costs must be controlled p2

mtmconsulting's new sector report maps the health of the UK's independent schools and looks forward to 2020 and beyond.

Finding the right marketing director p5

As the job of marketing independent schools gets ever more challenging, do you know what to look for when appointing a marketer?

Understanding the ins and outs of your parents' perceptions p6

Keeping an annual check on what your parents think of the school at the crucial entry and exit points is an invaluable guide to school improvement.

DON'T MISS Practical Strategies for Challenging Times

There are only a few places left for the annual mtmconsulting/Veale Wasbrough strategy conference at the Institute of Directors on 15th September. Details p6

Charting a safe course to 2020

Limited availability so book your place now! Details p6

Have the facts at your fingertips

In difficult times you must know the facts to build your strategies. It may seem obvious, but be aware of where you make the best surpluses, and where margins are tighter. Be absolutely up to date with the current recruitment situation – not that long list of registrations that the registrar says might result in enrolment, but the list of those who will walk up the drive in September 2010. And it won't hurt to do a health check on the strategy for recruitment in the next 12 months: What are the tactical campaigns? Who needs to be doing what? Is progress regularly reported?

Money

Some might be tempted to rush into reducing fees, or offering more concessions. But independent education is a top-of-the-range service: it's simply not an option to present a sudden reduction in price. What is possible, and much more sensible, is to seek out ways of building more value – going that extra mile to exceed parental expectations in order that they will spread positive messages about the school.

Fee collection

In general, schools are much better at this these days, but making that extra effort to collect fee arrears is essential. Some parents have a knack of paying their other creditors, and making you wait before they pay their school fees.

Cost control

The new **mtmconsulting independent sector report** (summarised in this newsletter) has identified that cost control – and careful management of fee levels – is vital if the sector is going to keep its share of the market. In a downturn it's absolutely fundamental to success.

Tough Decisions

Be prepared to make tough decisions. These may be to do with subjects that are too expensive to offer, people who are unproductive, or plans that are too expensive to implement.

In the good times it may have been possible to delay. In the bad times delay will prove much more costly. Decision making pointers are:

- Get the facts
- Define the decision criteria
- Draw up a pros and cons balance sheet
- Does it match your gut feeling?

Marketing

Now is the time to focus on marketing. In tighter times it's very tempting to cut the marketing budget. This is always a mistake. Review the budget and spend the money more wisely – ensuring that the activities are in line with the strategy.

Sales

A great deal of marketing spend is wasted because of poor sales activity. No-one wants to seem pushy, but research has shown that the majority of parents expect their enquiry to be followed up, and are disappointed when no further interest is taken in their enquiry. Now is the time to roll your sleeves up and get on with some old fashioned sales activity, rather than just taking 'orders' – make every lead count, and manage it through the sales process. It's a good time, too, to ensure that all staff are reminded about what's special about your school – in business terms if you can't differentiate yourself from your competitors then the only way that you can compete is on price, which means even more emphasis on paring costs at a time when this is difficult.

Avoid Eeyore; embrace Tigger

Things may be more difficult but it's not a time to focus on doom and gloom. Difficult times often bring out the best in us, and going back to fundamental business principles is not only sensible, but can be great fun.

Enjoy the new term.

Melanie Tucker

A new road map of the likely development of independent schools in the UK has just been provided by mtmconsulting.

Schools will bounceback from recession ...but cost control the key to long-term health

The Independent Education Sector Report 2010, **mtmconsulting's** second overview of the health of a sector now worth £7billion annually, predicts that independent schools will bounce back strongly from the current recession.

A significant increase in independent school pupil numbers from 2012 onwards will be boosted by a parental reaction to unrest and disruption in the state sector, brought on by the consequences of the likely cuts in public expenditure which any incoming Government is bound to make.

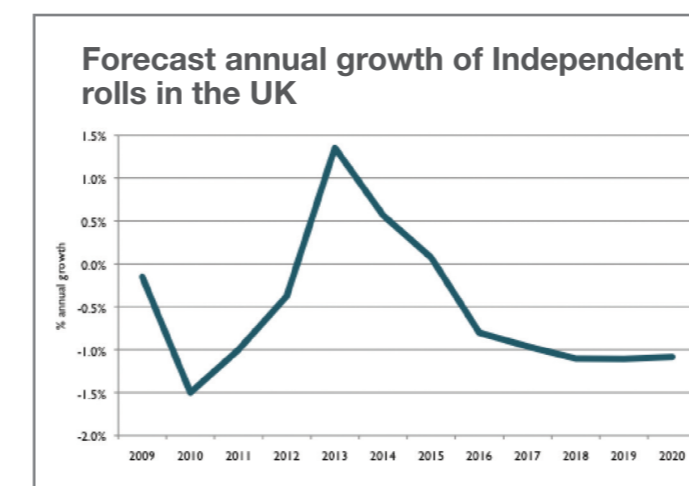
It also forecasts a variety of opportunities for flexible and innovative schools as the educational landscape changes and the distinction between state and private sectors is further blurred.

But the report gives a sharp warning that further recovery will be imperilled if the sector fails to address the vital issue of affordability. Unless schools control their costs more effectively and moderate their fee demands, the report predicts a lengthy period of steady decline in numbers from 2015 onwards.

The report, like its 2007 predecessor, has been compiled by Gavin Humphries, an experienced business analyst. He writes: **"Affordability may be falling but if this can be reversed the potential market for independent schools is very large. We put the figure... at more than two million pupils. But to achieve this, schools must restrain the continuing growth in fees by tackling their finances."**

The 160-page report has seven main sections, supplemented by profiles of significant developments in schools and school groups and an analysis of regional trends. The sections are:

- **Pupil trends:** The target market for independent schools is growing fast, says the report, as the professional and managerial classes expand. But independent schools' rolls have not kept pace with this expansion, largely because they have failed to control their costs and have become progressively more unaffordable. Without action to reverse this trend, independent school numbers could eventually start to decline by 0.5% per year.
- **Financial trends:** Administration and premises costs have been rising fast but teaching costs "appear to be out of control," says the report. "Because teacher numbers have grown so much faster than pupil numbers, since 1981 the number of pupils per teacher has fallen by a third from 12.6 to 8.3 (with a fall of 4% in 2009 alone). The net effect has been to put teaching costs up by 50%. It would be hard to argue that the quality of education in schools had improved by an equivalent 50% over the same period; their productivity has demonstrably not." One result is a large swathe of schools failing to achieve reasonable surpluses, which will be vulnerable to the recession.



Forecast of school numbers if schools fail to control costs'

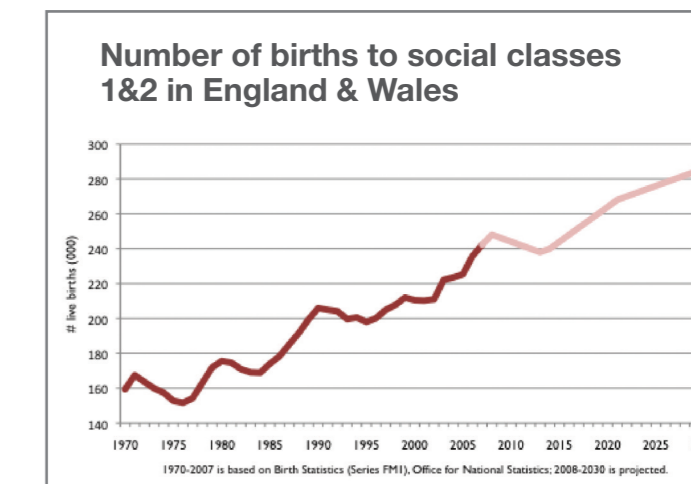
- **Structural trends:** until the current recession, the total number of independent schools in the UK was increasing. Against a relatively static total number of pupils, this meant that the average size of school started to decline. The need to seek economies of scale and to minimise costs per pupil will see this trend reversed, says the report, with schools growing larger and more of them joining or being subsumed in groups and alliances.

- **Segment trends:** The market for independent education is polarising between 'premier league' schools and niche schools, the report concludes. There are ever-fewer opportunities for good but medium-sized, all-round schools. Premier league schools are those that have established themselves in a pre-eminent position in either the boarding or academic market. Niche schools are those that have carefully defined their educational market and present themselves as being the best in their chosen field. Perhaps the most established niche is for children with special educational needs such as dyslexia.

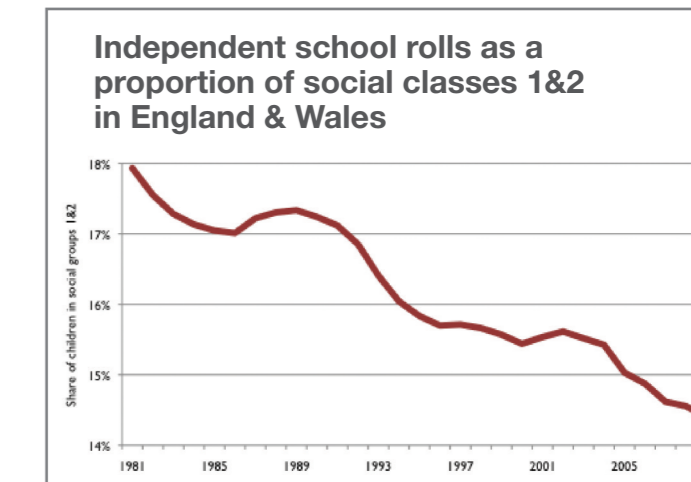
- **Political trends:** A Conservative victory in 2010 will represent a significant new challenge for the independent sector, says the report. Their plans for privately-provided, but free, schools will both drive up standards in the state sector generally and attract pupils away from independent schools.

- **Forecasts to 2020:** Taking the effects of the recession, demographic changes, unrest in the state sector and declining affordability of independent schools, the report forecasts a strong but short recovery in numbers in the early years of the next decade, followed by a protracted period of decline. It stresses, however, that this forecast is based on the assumption that schools fail to control their costs.

- **Scenarios to 2030:** The report suggests some longer term scenarios, produced by the pressures of limited funds, increased regulation and higher parental expectations. These will have an impact on both sectors and will change the face of education. As well as producing new challenges, says the report: "It will mean new ways of doing things in state education – and we think that this is the real opportunity for independent schools. This is the chance to win 30% or more of pupils."



The core market for independent schools is growing...



... but schools have been failing to capitalise on this growth

"To seize these opportunities schools will need vision and energy. But this abounds in a sector that has managed to stay resolutely ahead of anything thrown at it so far."

The **mtmconsulting Independent Education Sector Report 2010**, price £395 (incl. vat & p&p), is available from **mtmconsulting Ltd**, Portland House, 43 High Street, Southwold, Suffolk, IP18 6AB, **For more information contact Joe Faulkner on 01502 722787 or jfaulkner@mtmconsulting.co.uk**



Will the Tories' plans for thousands of Swedish-style free schools hit the demand for independent schools?