



▶ **HERE'S WHAT YOUR SCHOOL NEEDS NEXT FROM MARKETING AND ADMISSIONS**



### ***Didn't See that Coming***

You don't have to be a veteran of the independent school world to know that full enrollment is not the norm for most schools. Some private school leaders will go their entire career without telling a parent, "We'd love to have your family, but I'm sorry – we're just out of room."

So when the stars align and there's suddenly a waiting list in multiple grades – and precious few open seats in the others – Marketing and Admissions professionals can find themselves in unfamiliar territory.





▶ **IT MIGHT SOUND SOMETHING LIKE THIS ...**

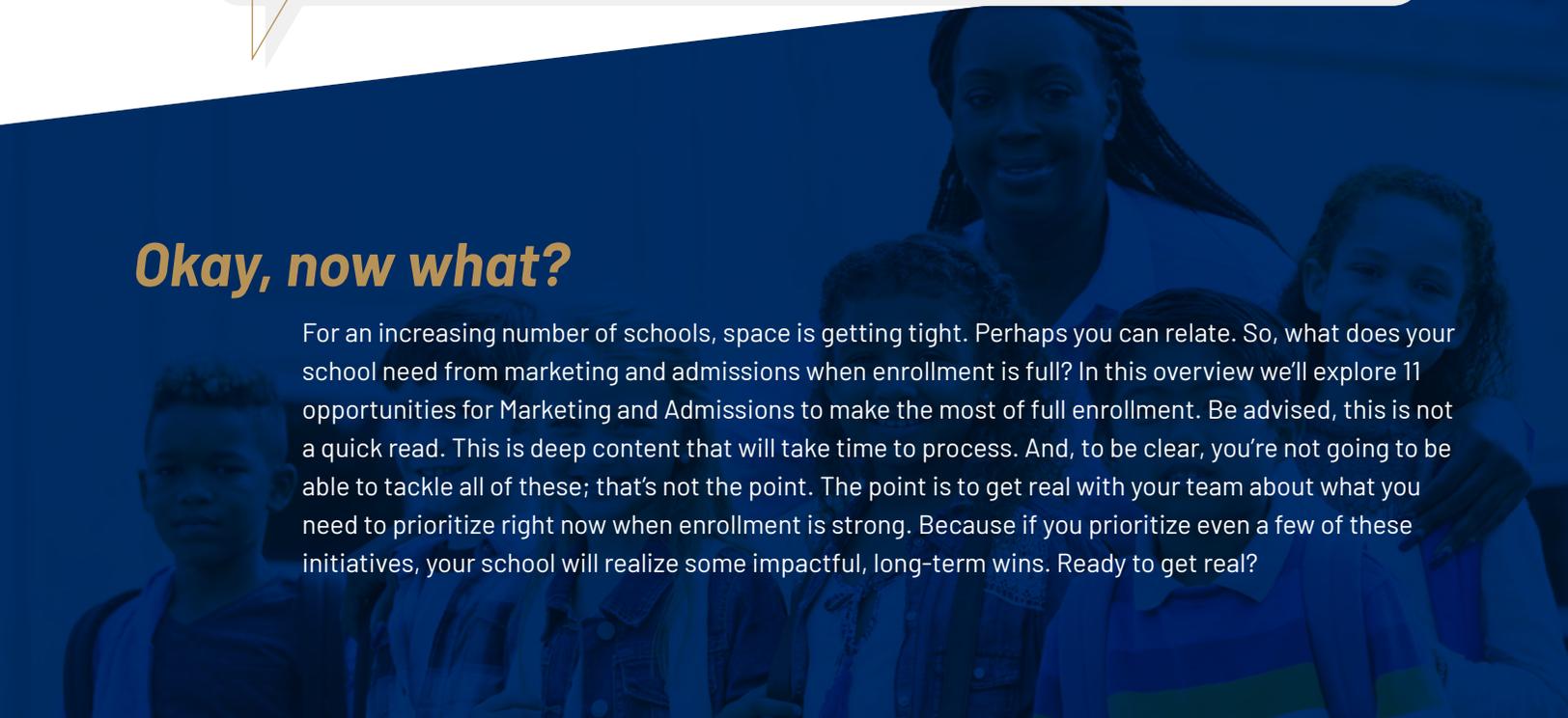
**ADMISSIONS YELLS DOWN THE HALL TO MARKETING,** *“Stop! Turn it off! It’s no fun telling families we don’t have room for them!”*

**MARKETING YELLS BACK,** *“What?!? Turn it off? Hey, this is a good problem! What if we have some seats open up? Let’s keep adding to our waiting lists!”*

**HEAD OF SCHOOL OVERHEARS THE EXCHANGE.** *“Waiting lists? Record enrollment? Roll in the modulars! Add new sections! And ... excuse me while I make a phone call ... (ring, ring ...) Hey, Board Chair? It’s me, Head ... about that new building I was talking about last spring ...”*

## **Okay, now what?**

For an increasing number of schools, space is getting tight. Perhaps you can relate. So, what does your school need from marketing and admissions when enrollment is full? In this overview we’ll explore 11 opportunities for Marketing and Admissions to make the most of full enrollment. Be advised, this is not a quick read. This is deep content that will take time to process. And, to be clear, you’re not going to be able to tackle all of these; that’s not the point. The point is to get real with your team about what you need to prioritize right now when enrollment is strong. Because if you prioritize even a few of these initiatives, your school will realize some impactful, long-term wins. Ready to get real?





# 1

## RIGHT-SIZE YOUR ONLINE MARKETING.

Are you really full? Before you pause your paid search and paid social campaigns, take a look at your remaining open seats grade-by-grade. You may have more space than you thought in a particular Age-and-Stage™. If you have some openings you want to fill, optimize your website and digital strategies to reach qualified families in your updated target zones. Here's what that could look like:

**First**, feature your openings on your website. Yes, this might seem a bit unorthodox, but hang with us. There's nothing like scarcity coupled with a deadline to make a thing more desirable. (Ever noticed how Amazon.com tells you how many items are "In stock" for an item you've checked out? Or how Hotels.com tells you "Only 3 rooms left at this rate"?) Post your openings for specific grade levels on the homepage of your site. Let prospective families know exactly how many seats you have open in each grade level. *"But we've never done that before."* That's okay. You don't need to leave this information up year-round – just during peak season. *"What about the grades that are full?"* Encourage families to

inquire anyway. You never know when a spot may open up. If you don't have space this year, put them into your CRM and check back during your next enrollment season. They'll appreciate the follow up.

**Second**, dial in your digital strategies for the Ages-and-Stages™ where you have openings. Modify your messaging and the demographic focus of your digital ads. These adjustments will keep you from getting slammed with inquiries for grades that are full. Boost posts on social media, pointing prospective families to your website to see current openings.

Whatever you do, don't go dark with your online marketing. If you pull back completely on lead-generation ads, spin up a brand awareness campaign that features key tenants of your value proposition without pushing for a specific action. This is a true branding play that will reinforce your value proposition for current families and raise awareness among prospective future families.

**Only 2 Seats Available**

**Apply Now >**

# 2

## FOCUS ON RETENTION.

Unless their student is about to graduate, most families don't want to buy just one grade from you. They enroll with the intention to keep going, assuming the current grade goes well. But we can't just presume they're going to re-enroll. They're still your customer, and they need to be sold on what's next for their child – not just the next grade, but the next Age-and-Stage™.

As you optimize your external marketing efforts, develop a plan for taking your retention strategy to the next level. Here's a brief overview of the approach:

- 1. Develop messaging to promote each Age-and-Stage™ to the appropriate internal audiences. For example, your kindergarten families need to hear about the elementary school experience. Elementary school families need to learn about what's in store in middle school, and middle school families need to learn about high school. Your messaging should be a compelling narrative that excites parents (and students) about the opportunities for growth and engagement that lie ahead at your school.**
- 2. Create the tools you need to effectively sell the next Age-and-Stage™ to internal audiences. These can include print collateral, infographics, videos, and presentation decks. Start with the tools you've created for your external audiences and reframe them to focus on your current families.**
- 3. Develop a retention calendar that includes communications, promotions, and events. For each Age-and-Stage™, map out a timeline and assign specific tasks to Marketing and Admissions team members.**

A robust retention plan might seem like a heavy lift, but it doesn't have to be. Start small and make incremental gains, either going deep on a specific Age-and-Stage™ that's lagging or spreading out your efforts evenly.



*Regardless of your approach, you're smart to invest in retention. It's far less costly to keep a current family than it is to attract new ones.*



### What is an Age-and-Stage™?

An Age-and-Stage™ is a major division in your school: early years, preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high. These divisions represent likely on-ramps and off-ramps for families as their children grow, develop, and mature. Age-and-Stage™ strategies are important for both recruitment and retention.

# 3

## EVALUATE YOUR MARKETING PLATFORM.

Your Marketing Platform is the foundational marketing infrastructure you need to support your recruitment efforts. It's comprised of the following:

- **BRANDING:** your academic and athletic brands and your Brand Standards Guide
- **MESSAGING:** the narratives you use to sell your school by Age-and-Stage™
- **MULTIMEDIA:** the photos and videos you use showcase and export your culture
- **WEBSITE:** the always-open virtual front door for prospective families
- **PRINT COLLATERAL:** the brochures, pocket folders, and info sheets you give to prospective families
- **PRESENTATION COLLATERAL:** the decks you use to present your school to various audiences
- **MARTECH (marketing technology):** the software systems and platforms you use to run and track your marketing

Your Marketing Platform is all about “readiness to sell.” As you promote your school in the marketplace, interested families will engage with your Marketing Platform. It can be challenging to find the time and money to invest in your marketing platform when you’re pushing hard to grow enrollment. But when enrollment is full, your team should be in a good place to take on some of the larger infrastructure projects – a rebrand, website build, refresh of your photo library, or a series of message workshops.

In your next Marketing and Admissions meeting, set aside 30 minutes to discuss which Marketing Platform components need to be refreshed or overhauled. It could be an excellent time to reinvest your returns from strong enrollment.

*Oaks Christian School Branding  
by North Star Marketing.*



OCS-Icon-OnDark



OCS-Icon-White



OCS-Icon-Gray



DC Icon White  
OCS-Icon-White

**ROOTED IN CHRIST. READY FOR TOMORROW.**

OCS-Tagline-Green

**ROOTED IN CHRIST. READY FOR TOMORROW.**

OCS-Tagline-White

# 4

## INVEST IN SEO.

If online advertising (e.g., Google Ads, Facebook and Instagram ads, etc.) is the microwave of lead generation, search engine optimization is the crockpot. It takes longer for SEO to warm up, but once your school achieves coveted top rankings for important keywords on page 1 of Google, you'll never want to go back to being invisible on page 2. Here are a few advantages of committing to SEO when enrollment is full:

1. **Earned rankings through SEO can help you reduce your dependence on paid advertising.**
2. **Organic search rankings are often viewed as more trustworthy than paid placement.**
3. **You can optimize for more specific keywords that connect with long-tail search phrases, not just general terms.**
4. **Done effectively, SEO does more than just boost your rankings. It also increases the value of your site for qualified families, as the content you develop and optimize helps them navigate the Family Journey with more clarity.**

While SEO can certainly get "techy," you don't need to be a website developer to improve your rankings. Start by benchmarking your current search results for keywords, then develop a content plan that focuses on those themes. Bear in mind that your rankings won't improve immediately. It can take several days and even weeks for Google to re-index your site. But, be assured, it's worth the wait. If you want to go deeper with your SEO strategy, and you don't have the expertise in-house, [let's talk](#). The North Star Marketing team can either pitch in or point you in the right direction.



# 5

## IMPLEMENT CONTINUOUS ENROLLMENT.

*Rather than asking families to re-up every year, make re-enrollment the expectation. Families should have to take action to opt-out, not to keep opting in.*

You'll save your staff countless hours of pestering and nagging, and you'll make things easier for your families, too.

Dr. Rick Newberry with Enrollment Catalyst is one of the foremost experts on Continuous Enrollment. If you want to go deeper, [check out his resources](#) on why continuous enrollment makes sense.

# 6

## DIAL IN YOUR DASHBOARDS WITH METRICS THAT MATTER.

What information do you monitor to know if your marketing is working and if your enrollment is healthy? Can you gather, consolidate, and evaluate data quickly to understand how you're progressing toward important goals? Regardless of the software systems you use, here is a high-level summary of data that will help your team stay on track:



- **Leads by campaign**
- **Leads by channel**  
*(e.g., Google Ads, Facebook ad, Instagram ad, organic search, etc.)*
- **Open opportunities**
- **Closed opportunities**
- **Cost-per-lead**
- **Cost-per-acquisition**
- **Total ad spend**
- **Return on investment (ROI)**
- **Lifetime ROI**
- **Website traffic**
- **Social media followers**
- **Target enrollment per grade**
- **Retention by grade**

Visualization doesn't have to be complicated. We recommend using a simple Google Sheets document (or other cloud-based spreadsheet). You just need to be gathering and reviewing the metrics that matter regularly with your team. There's no time like the present to dial in your numbers.

# 7

## BRING STRUCTURE TO YOUR MEETING RHYTHMS.

We've all sat through poorly organized and insufferably long meetings that "could've been an email," but if structured and run effectively, meetings can help teams get the traction they need to win together.

In our experience, most Marketing and Admissions teams are not aligned. They're operating on assumptions, looking at different metrics, and missing key opportunities for collaboration. These gaps can be closed (in part) through a standardized meeting cadence. Here's a quick snapshot of the meetings your team should be having:

- 1. An annual strategic planning day:** look back, look ahead, set goals
- 2. Quarterly half-day huddles:** evaluate progress toward goals, evaluate effectiveness over last quarter
- 3. Monthly reviews:** track progress toward goals, review key metrics
- 4. Weekly check-ins:** general updates, updates on projects, discuss issues and opportunities
- 5. Daily stand-ups:** team member updates and clarifying conversations; identify and remove roadblocks

# 8

## RAMP UP YOUR PARENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM.

With full enrollment, your school is probably buzzing with energy and excitement. Many new families are thrilled with what they're getting at your school, and your veteran families are encouraged by the growth they've seen over the years. There's no better time to start your Parent Ambassador Program.

*Parent Ambassadors are volunteer influencers who spread positive word-of-mouth about your school. They raise a hand because they believe in what you do, and they're willing to proactively engage their network on your behalf.*

These parents have high-trust relationships with families that are likely candidates for your school.

Again, Dr. Rick Newberry with Enrollment Catalyst is an excellent resource on this topic. He has helped many schools plan and implement Parent Ambassador programs. Consider adding this important initiative to your strategy this school year.





# 9

## IMPLEMENT A PROCESS FOR GATHERING TESTIMONIALS FROM HAPPY FAMILIES.



You know they're important, but you probably don't have a good system in place for gathering testimonials and reviews. "We've tried, but parents just don't follow through when we ask them to leave us a review." We get it. Gathering positive feedback can feel like pushing a rope. But you can't give up on this one. Families are shopping for you online, and ratings, reviews, and testimonials inform their opinions. You need to put a sustainable solution in place for this. Here's a brief overview of the process:

- 1. Start by taking an inventory of rating and review sites where your school shows up. Here are few to get you started:**
  - [Google My Business](#)
  - [Facebook](#)
  - [Niche.com](#)
  - [greatschools.org](#)
  - [PrivateSchoolReview.com](#)
- 2. Next, develop simple instructions for each platform, including screen grabs with annotations for how to step through the process.**
- 3. Create a list of families to ask about leaving reviews and testimonials. Be specific with your request: specific platforms at specific times. Be sure to communicate how important positive reviews are for the school.**
- 4. Finally, send them the instructions and ask them to have it done by the agreed-upon date. You may need to do a screen share with them to walk them through the process. Follow up as needed until it's done.**

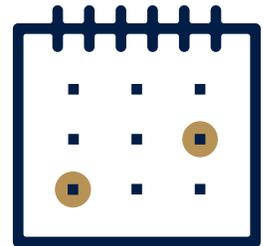
**A WORD TO THE WISE:** Spread your reviews out over several months. It can look like you're trying to game the ratings system if you have multiple reviews in a condensed period of time.

## FOCUS ON STORYTELLING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUR BLOG.

Prospective parents want to know that people like them have had a positive, successful experience at your school. Stories are one of the most compelling affirmations that they're on the right track.

You should always be on the lookout for stories of success that reinforce your value proposition. These stories can be about students, parents, faculty and staff, and alumni. We have seen strong engagement by displaying stories on the homepage of our clients' websites, connecting the content to the appropriate categories on their blogs. Here is a quick summary of the process:

- 1. Start by committing to a cadence. How often do you want to post a success story? We recommend two per month to keep the content fresh and to build volume over time.**
- 2. Next, develop a framework for the stories. Having a standardized approach will make the commitment more manageable for your team and the people you're highlighting.**
- 3. Plan 3-4 stories in advance, and send your stakeholders the framework for the story. Schedule an initial meeting and let them know you'll be talking through the document with them. You may choose to interview them and write the piece, or you may ask them to jot down their thoughts in the framework document.**
- 4. Once the piece is developed, post it to your blog and promote it through social and to your email list.**



Over time, you'll build an impressive library of success stories. This will help to not only affirm that you're a good choice for prospective families, but also increase your rankings with search engine.





# 11

## **CLEAN UP, CLEAN OUT, AND ORGANIZE YOUR FILES AND ASSETS.**

Okay, this one probably doesn't sound like a lot of fun, but you've probably got some long overdue organizing to do in your shared assets folders. When was the last time you sorted out the digital files you use to support your marketing and admissions efforts? Here are a few possibilities for getting your folders and files in shape:

- 1. Commit to a consistent naming structure for your files.**
- 2. Create a logical folder structure, and name folders clearly.**
- 3. Organize your photo assets by grade level (with folders for each Age-and-Stage™).**
- 4. Catalog assets by type: branding, website, print collateral, presentations, online marketing, traditional advertising, etc.**

Admittedly, some folks love this sort of stuff, but for the rest of us, it sounds like a chore. Regardless of your disposition, we can all agree that having your digital house in order can save you and your team a lot of time and frustration.



# LET US HEAR THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER: *NEVER STOP MARKETING.*

You can't afford to stop telling your story, even when the seats are full. You must continue to position your school as the most desirable option in your market for mission-aligned families. Because strong enrollment today is no guarantee of strong enrollment next year or the year after.



*And, of course, if you'd like to discuss any of these or other marketing priorities with us, just drop us a line.*

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