

# Making the Connection

**CONNECTING TO YOUR COMMUNITY CAN BE THE FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD TO BECOMING ENROLLMENT RICH.**

**E**NROLLMENT MARKETING IS NOT JUST ABOUT enrollment; it is about creating relationships and serving your community or target audience for many years. The first step in building such relationships is making a connection, and that is what effective marketing is all about. Administrators, teachers and critical support team members all have the power to connect with the community and help to make your school enrollment rich.

## Making Individual Connections

The person-to-person connection will always be the strongest. Every staff member at your school is in a position to market your program through the individual connections they make in the community each day. They simply must be armed with a clear, effective marketing message they can share with others.

If you are a school leader, the first connection you should make is with your own teachers and support staff. Make sure they understand the value of your school and its programs. They should know what those programs can mean to the community in terms of a strong local economy and promising future careers for their children. They should have the same passion that you have about what you do. That is the message—and the emotion—that they need to take out into the community.

Meetings of civic organizations, clubs and other community groups can all present opportunities to share your marketing message. School leaders who are well-informed about the benefits of your programs and who are effective public speakers should become ambassadors for your school and take every possible opportunity to speak at such meetings. Using

an effective marketing message, a thorough knowledge of the school's structure and programs, and, most importantly, a true belief in the benefits the school has to offer, a teacher or administrator can make an emotional connection with parents and business leaders.

## Making the Community Connection

In addition to making connections with community and civic groups, educators need to connect with business leaders.

Local business and industry needs skilled employees, and a career and technical school is ideally suited to provide those employees. Make sure you know about the local business community and its changing needs, and that the business community knows about your school and its ability to work on meeting those needs.

As I always say, don't let your school become the best kept secret in town—or even in your district or state. Expanding your horizons beyond city limits can result in expanded enrollment as well. You might consider attending meetings at the district or state level to find out about new educational or economic initiatives. These are considerations for future offerings at your school or could provide confirmation of the value your programs already provide—and that can become a powerful marketing tool.

## Connecting at a Professional Level

Professional association meetings at the local, state, regional and national levels are another way to connect to marketing ideas. Through networking with fellow career and technical educators and by attending informative sessions, you can:

- learn best-practices and how to market

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- them to your audience
- develop your enthusiasm—the marketing advantage
  - create an experience in your program and school worth marketing
  - build emotional attachment and loyalty with current and prospective students by learning to connect with your audience

The national ACTE Annual Convention and Career Tech Expo, as well as the meetings of state associations are ideally suited for networking and for growing professionally.

A professional association meeting is an opportunity for learning about areas that may be outside your particular area of expertise, and one of these may be marketing. By browsing the program and planning your schedule, you will find sessions that can help you promote your program.

You might want to attend a session on making students at the middle school level

aware of the career-tech programs that are available at your high school or one on how to transition secondary students into your two-year postsecondary program. Look for sessions that address your school's needs. Find out what others have done to achieve success and how you can replicate those efforts.

### The Power Connection

Sometimes “marketing” your school means selling the idea to community, state and even federal legislators. Bond issues can directly affect a school and its programs, so it is important to know when such an issue is going to be on the ballot. State and federal legislation can also have an impact on schools. The members of your community who are your “consumers” should have the information to make informed decisions when it comes to education, so they should be aware of your school and how any bonds or legislation will affect the educational opportunities available to them.

Marketing is more than just a “sales pitch,” when it includes valuable information.

Career and technical schools have the power to make a difference in their communities, states and even their country by providing the skilled workforce that fuels the national economy. Marketing can help to sell that message and maximize enrollment.

I am a marketing professional, and I believe in the power and the value of marketing, but I focus on providing services to career and technical education schools because I believe just as strongly in the power and the value of career and technical education. For your success, recruiting new students and retaining current students are the keys, and one of the best ways to do that is to develop a marketing- and enrollment-driven organization. It all begins with a connection to your community and target audience, and when that connection is made successfully, the results can be electrifying. ■