

MEASURING FOR MARKETING

A SURVEY OF STUDENT KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES ABOUT CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION IS HELPING A NEW YORK CAREER TECH CENTER PLAN ITS MARKETING STRATEGIES.

How does one effectively market career and technical education (CTE) programs? This is a question many of us who work as administrators and public relations and marketing professionals in CTE deal with on a daily basis. The way we obtain our information concerning how our audiences learn about us is vital to how we successfully market ourselves.

In the article, "Positive Student Attitudes Toward CTE," in the November/December 2005 issue of *Techniques*, the authors said, "Of primary concern is student enrollment in CTE programs. Unlike mathematics, English and science, CTE programs are electives within the high school curriculum. If students choose not to *elect* CTE programs, then enrollment declines, and if that erosion continues, those affected programs are ultimately discontinued."

This is an important point. In the case of the CTE Center at the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison (OHM) BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) in New Hartford, New York, without student enrollment the center would not exist. The opportunity for

CTE would not be there for the students in the 12 component districts it serves.

But, in the case of the OHM BOCES CTE Center, it has seen enrollments increase almost 17 percent in the past four years. With the addition of new programs and our overall marketing, we thought we were doing a decent job of getting our word out; however, we're always looking at ways to improve. We conducted a survey of perceptions, similar to one conducted by the Wexford Missaukee Area Career Technical Center (WMACTC) in Cadillac, Michigan, which was highlighted in the aforementioned article.

The goal was to find out what students know about CTE, their attitudes toward it, who had an influence on their perceptions, and how they receive their information regarding CTE. Because we are strictly dealing with how to market CTE, this article will deal with the findings of overall student perceptions and how students receive their information. After the findings, I will also discuss what the OHM BOCES CTE Center plans to do to change and update its marketing strategies.

By Jean Palmer

Jean Palmer

is a public relations assistant at the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services in New Hartford, New York. She can be contacted at JPALMER@oneida-boces.org.

Asking the Questions

In this study, conducted late last spring, all high school students (both those attending CTE programs and those not) from the 12 BOCES component districts, varying in sizes from rural to city, were surveyed. Overall, 889 students responded to the survey, of which 76 students were enrolled in a CTE program, and 796 were not participating in a CTE program.

Borrowing from the survey conducted by the WMACTC, students were asked to identify whom they believed the CTE center was designed to serve. The categories were: for those who plan to go to college immediately after high school; those who plan to go to work immediately after high school; those who plan to join the military immediately after high school; those who don't perform well in a traditional classroom setting; those who are discipline problems; and those of all ability levels. Overall, the image of CTE was favorable. Sixty percent of all students agreed that the CTE Center was designed to serve students who plan to attend college right after high school. More than 70 percent of all students agree that it serves students of all ability levels.

One of the more interesting findings from the survey was what influenced students when making a decision to attend. Of students attending a CTE program, friends were a major influence, with 44 percent having an influence. Those same students said the opportunity to meet new people was also a major factor, with 49 percent saying this was an influence.

The OHM BOCES CTE Center presented the extensive results of the survey to its advisory council, which is made up of local business leaders, to get their feedback and ideas of where to go next.

The plan now is to keep educating students in high school, and possibly look at educating students as early as middle school about CTE. Currently, the guidance counselors at the OHM BOCES CTE Center give presentations to 10th graders at the high schools in the 12 component districts.

Building on that, we're looking to change how we present information to 10th graders. In the ever-changing technological world, more students are learning about new things through Web sites and other electronic means. For this year, we plan to equip our guidance counselors with a presentation similar to PowerPoint. Before, counselors would go into the schools, give their presentations and hand out print materials. For the future, we hope to have an interactive CD that counselors can distribute to students, which they can put into their computers and access information about CTE.

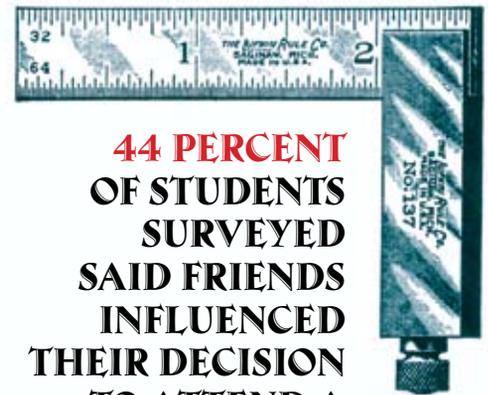
On the CD, the goal is to set up a video of a "day in the life" of a current student. It will show that, not only can they attend a CTE program, but they can enjoy time at their home school, participate in extracurricular activities and get all the credits they need to obtain a Regents diploma. We learned that students are influenced by their peers, so who better to tell them about their experience than a current student?

Planning for Results

The more information we can get to each student, earlier, the better we feel they can make a decision about attending CTE programs, especially if they are being influenced by their peers. The goal is to make sure their friends are educated enough about CTE to provide the right influence.

Through the survey, we also learned that parents or guardians had an influence on whether students attended the CTE Center. For students currently attending a CTE program, 58 percent responded that their parent or guardian influenced their decision. For students not attending a CTE program, 16 percent responded that their parent or guardian influenced them.

These results showed us that, when marketing, we need to continue and possibly step up our marketing to focus on parents and other adults who might influence a student. Some ways we might market to parents in the future are to continue to



**44 PERCENT
OF STUDENTS
SURVEYED
SAID FRIENDS
INFLUENCED
THEIR DECISION
TO ATTEND A
CTE PROGRAM.
58 PERCENT
SAID THAT A
PARENT OR
GUARDIAN HAD
INFLUENCED
THEM.**

provide them with print materials about our programs; invite them to open houses so they can experience what happens at our CTE Center; publicize what students in the classes are doing on a regular basis; and keep the Web site updated with current information. A parent survey has not been conducted, but should be considered to find out how parents obtain their information and what their perceptions of CTE are, so we can better market to them.

Looking Ahead

To conclude, as times change, we, as promoters of CTE, need to continue to seek new ways to get our message out to our main audience—the students. Continuing to find out how students obtain information and how they are influenced through conducting surveys or focus groups will help keep marketing plans in check.

Hopefully we will see a continuation of rising enrollments, especially at a time when the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says 18 to 20 of the fastest-growing occupations in the next decade will require CTE. We need to put our best face forward to keep our audiences interested. ■