

# Marketing Adventist Higher Education

## Some Practical Strategies

By Loren Dickinson

**P**robably the word *survival* has never applied to Adventist higher education quite as it does now. If this is so, one of the most important keys to keeping our schools alive is to tell the higher education story. In a word—marketing.

Following are a series of useful strategies that have, in some instances, helped students and parents make an SDA campus the school of their choice.\*

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\*I'm indebted to some 25 people who provided marketing ideas in response to a questionnaire I developed.

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Loren Dickinson is Chairman of the Communications Department at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

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### The Personal Approach

Any inquiry that arrives from a prospective student ought to be answered personally and promptly by the right people. Who are the right people? Generally admissions and financial aid officers would be likely candidates. So would academic department or division chairmen and teachers. Few factors will impress a potential student as much as a personal contact from the college division in which he or she intends to study.

As a departmental chairman, I always assume that the prospective student has a serious interest. I treat every inquiry as a professional one and respond promptly.

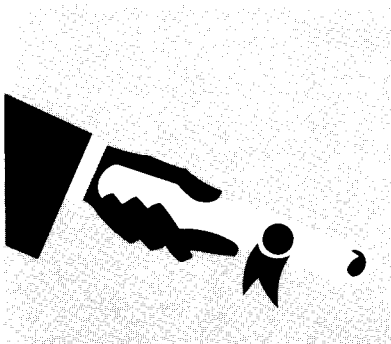
When prospective students and/or parents visit, they ought to be treated as treasured friends and clients. They deserve a VIP to escort them to significant campus points and personnel.

"We wrote ahead to the college I considered attending," said one petite, intelligent freshman. "They should have had someone on hand to meet us. But no one came around." She had applied to two colleges, and chose to attend the second one—the one she hadn't visited.

### Effective Follow-up

Colleges, of course, must both recruit new students and retain those they have already recruited. Until recently, most schools worked much harder at recruitment than at retention.

Marketing strategy must include a system of tracking the progress of students—especially new ones such as freshmen and transfers. "One of the weakest links in our system," said a graduate who is herself a health-care marketing director, "is the academic advisor who is supposed to advise, but doesn't."



Good advisors are an invaluable marketing resource. Bad ones are costly. Simply feeding reams of information about the new students into the computer will do nothing to help them conquer the complexities of adjusting to a new school. Advisors need to translate

the facts generated by computer printouts into useful assistance for teachers and students, with special emphasis on being "people people" who keep in touch with students, helping them understand how to change courses and adjust their programs, or offering a listening ear to their concerns and frustrations.

Freshman orientation can serve an important function in assisting not only freshmen, but also transfer students, foreign students, or non-English speaking enrollees to make a smooth transition into college life.

Board members should regularly promote the values of the colleges in formal and informal settings. To do so, they need comprehensive and up-to-date program and activities data. College relations personnel can supply this in cooperation with admissions and financial aid officers.

Colleges can employ a retired alumni couple to represent and promote the school to churches in its territory. The costs incurred would be chiefly travel expenses, not salaries.

Another idea would be to employ enthusiastic college students to spend the summer recruiting for your college.

### Inform the Constituents

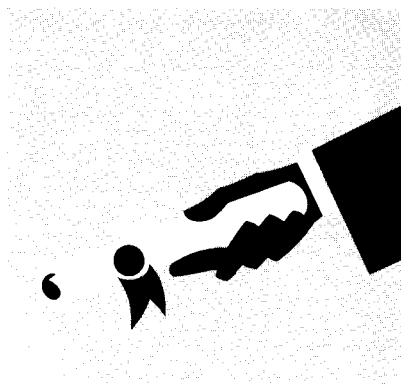
Send college teachers to speak at academy campuses. Do the same where possible at community college centers. Ask those teachers firstly to promote the values of Adventist education; secondly, to extol the college's virtues; and thirdly, to promote the wonders of the counselor's own specialty.

### Demonstrate Your Wares

Provide constituents with consistent exposure to your faculty by encouraging teachers to accept appointments at church services,

rallies, and camp meetings. Such contacts will inspire confidence in the dedication and competence of the faculty and will give them opportunities to counsel potential students regarding the benefits of Christian education.

Sponsor professionally related activities in major population



centers served by your institution. Weekend seminars or Sunday workshops can offer a whole host of topics that will benefit teachers and college constituents. By charging modest fees to attendees, the college can defray the costs of such seminars.

Call "no-shows" within a week of the new term. Very few will register as a result of the call alone, but they will retain an important message—that the college cares about them. Follow up this contact with additional information about college activities and registration for future semesters.

The preceding interpersonal contacts will make positive statements about your campus and the people who work there.

### Use Media Effectively

We will now look at some media contacts that should prove useful in marketing your school.

Produce a short video presentation called "College Spotlight" (patterned after "Mission Spotlight"). Show it at churches, camp

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"Among the myths incorporated into standardized tests, Mr. Ellman said, are that all students work at the same pace and that all have mastered the same body of knowledge by the time the test is given.

"Further, he said, standardized tests do not reflect a holistic method for teaching and learning, address the study of literature, or evaluate creativity and higher-order thinking skills."—*Education Week*, vol. V, No. 14, December 4, 1985. Reprinted by permission.

### Marijuana and Memory

Marijuana may have a greater effect on memory and thinking ability than has previously been thought. According to Jeff Fortune, a drug-abuse prevention counselor in Orange, California, THC (the most plentiful psychoactive substance in marijuana) appears to interfere with the manufacture of essential protein substances in the nuclei of brain cells.

The most noticeable effects of marijuana use are decreases in both memory and thinking ability. "Occasional use mainly affects short-term memory," notes Fortune. "Regular use, however, damages long-term and abstract memory." Other problems, such as difficulty with number-symbol substitution (replacing a series of numbers with symbols representing each number), serial subtraction (repeatedly subtracting a number from a larger number), and reading comprehension are also common.

THC remains in the body for up to 30 days after the person has used marijuana. "Because it stays in the body for such a long time, its effects on memory and thinking ability are prolonged," says Fortune. "Neither the weekend smoker nor the daily smoker

is ever free from marijuana's effects."—From a *Listen* news release.

### Nuts, Seeds Seen as Meat Substitutes in Food Programs

"The [U.S.] Agriculture Department has proposed adding peanuts and other seeds and nuts to its list of approved meat substitutes, in the school lunch, childcare, and summer-feeding programs. . . .

"The announcement said that 'most nuts and seeds and nut-and-seed butters' are nutritionally comparable to meat or the currently acceptable meat alternatives other than peanut butter—cheese, eggs, and cooked dry peas or beans."—*Education Week*, vol. V, No. 16, December 18, 1985. Reprinted by permission.

### Good Ideas

#### Teacher-Student Communication Through a "Hotline"

"To counter the impersonal effects of the large lecture class, one physiology professor at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln has turned to an unlikely source—the telephone-answering machine.

"When students in F. L. Pardi's human physiology class have questions about the course, they can call a number in the biology department and leave messages on the machine. They can ask about anything—examinations, laboratory work, assignments, or course policy.

"He listens to the messages each morning. If students ask him to return their calls, he does. Otherwise, he answers questions before his lecture in a three- to five-minute report called 'News from the Hotline.' . . .

"The hotline, which received between 7 and 12 calls a day, has reduced the traffic in his office, Mr. Pardi notes, and given him

more time for research. Only about 10 percent of the messages require call-backs, he says.

"Sometimes students offer anonymous criticism, an unintended benefit of the hotline.

"They will call and say, 'Slow down, you talk too fast,' or tell me that the exams are passed out too slowly,' he says.

"Sometimes I get interesting jokes, which I repeat to the class, too. The idea is to show that I am receptive to the students.'"—*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 4, 1985. Reprinted with permission. Copyright 1985 by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

### School Health Instruction and Smoking

*Almost three times as many students who do not receive health instruction begin smoking in the seventh grade, compared to students who have taken such courses, reports* The Journal of School Health. Their study of more than 30,000 students in grades 4-7 from 20 states showed less than 8 percent of the health-educated students were smoking, compared with more than 12 percent of a control group of seventh graders. □

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meetings, and youth events. Excellent quality video presentations can now be produced inexpensively. It might be best to produce such presentations in both Beta and VHS formats to accommodate different equipment available at various locations.

Ideas for short video clips or slide shows can include the curriculum, activities of various college

departments, the institution's work-study program, student association activities, spiritual life, and many other areas of student and faculty activity.

Produce short, uncomplicated audio cassettes on a host of topics (financial aid, college admissions requirements, departmental programs) and send these to potential students. These would not replace the college bulletin; they would, however, offer an economical means of promoting the merits of your college.

Establish a year-round toll-free 800 telephone line. Publicize it widely—to all pastors, academies, union paper readers—and include it in national advertising.

Encourage those who edit the college bulletin to write it in uncomplicated language. Include action shots of college activities rather than mood shots. A few dollars spent on good-quality photos of many aspects of college life will pay rich dividends in the attractiveness of the bulletin and its appeal to potential students.

Keep pastors, principals, and academy counselors apprised of college activities via a Kiplinger-style newsletter.

### **Reaching Nontraditional Students**

Design promotional materials specifically for the nonacademy, community college student, adult learners, and other nontraditional students. Important features to mention would include flexible class schedules, opportunity to network with other professionals, credit earned for life experiences or through testing, flexible payment plans and available financial aid, and child-care provisions. Advertise adult-oriented classwork and external degree programs through newspapers, radio and TV, magazines and newspapers, as well as

union papers and other SDA periodicals.

All these media strategies can make an impact for your college. Now, what types of contact will enhance the college in the eyes of its clientele? Here are some suggestions:

1. Use short, well-crafted testimonials from satisfied customers—primarily parents and students. Mothers, more often than fathers, seem to determine a young person's choice of college and career; therefore, use the words of credible mothers.

### **Scholarships for Achievement**

2. Promote openly and candidly the opportunities to be found at your school, e.g., cementing lifetime friendships with other Adventists, meeting potential marriage partners. Boldly stress to parents that SDA college education produces lifetime Adventists who, among other contributions, will assume leadership roles in the church and in their professions.

3. Consistently promote the quality of the college's program, as well as the standards and ideals for which the college stands. Mention, for example, that students have more opportunities to take leadership roles in a small school. Promote the value of personal attention from, and role modeling by, faculty and staff of high personal and professional caliber.

4. Offer or increase scholarships to high school and academy students who demonstrate superior achievement in their junior and senior years. Include class presidencies, campus ministries, student association offices, and of course academic achievers. Offer the top 20 percent attractive scholarships. Or offer a scholarship to any student with a "B" average since his or her sophomore year.

5. Host workshops, seminars,

and camps on your campus for high-school-aged students interested in computers, music, publications, drama, science, recreation, and sports. Schedule such programs over several weeks in the summer or during school vacations. These activities can be virtually self-supporting if you charge moderate fees to participants.

### **Tuition Rebate Program**

6. Offer and vigorously promote a tuition rebate program in which a certain amount will be applied to college students' accounts when they complete a term of academic work with a minimum GPA. Such a program should give your college a clear recruiting edge and stress its commitment to excellence.

7. Assemble a group of freshmen or sophomores to brainstorm ways they feel the college ought to be marketed, asking them what promotional efforts impressed them to attend the institution and what may have produced negative feelings.

8. Send performance groups far and wide to promote your college as well as inspire those who attend their programs. Directors of such groups need to consider the range of tastes represented by the audience. Musical groups, for instance, may find it tempting to perform pieces that for the most part don't appeal to a young audience. Sensitive directors can find excellent quality music that will appeal to young people while not alienating older members, and vice versa.

The above strategies for attracting and holding students may well make a difference if they are coupled with interpersonal and media contacts. The point of marketing, after all, is not merely advertising and publicity campaigns for public awareness; it's rather to shape relationships that produce a positive

image among the varied publics of a college or university.

### **Honest Stories, Caring Atmosphere**

Adventist college marketing ought to be perceived as conveying honest stories that portray the opportunity for higher education in an atmosphere of goodwill, excitement, warmth, spiritual caring, and quality training—an atmosphere where “piety and scholarship go hand in hand,” in the words of one religion teacher I interviewed for this article.

None of this can be accomplished unless college admissions officers and marketing personnel have a clear understanding of the college’s mission, assess the prospective market and determine its needs, and then, with the administration and staff, make sure that the school “provides the product it promises,” to quote a college relations director.

The ultimate product, for an Adventist college, is the development of Christian characters in its students. This high goal must constantly be kept in view by everyone connected with the college—administrators, teachers, pastors, and support staff, as well as public relations and marketing directors. □

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## **Editorial**

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only hope for the future. Money invested in education will yield rich rewards in many ways.

Aside from the ability to secure a job and increase one’s earning capacity, other issues are at stake. The more thoroughly people are educated, the more aware they become of life and its full meaning. Such individuals are better able to control their destiny. They can select their responses from broader

alternatives. The results are increasingly predictable and satisfying.

Education also develops in people increased sensitivity to their surroundings. The well-educated person becomes acutely aware of the needs of others and is more responsive and understanding toward them. Awareness results in tolerant attitudes and a broader world view.

Other benefits that enrich one’s life are gained through education, such as ability to make one’s home a secure and comfortable place, and to interact positively and creatively with one’s family and friends. Educational background also influences one’s capacity to become a person of influence in civic affairs, neighborhood projects and in the church. Such involvement is important and satisfying.

A well-educated person can and should be a patron of the arts, supporting and participating in cultural and intellectual events and thereby bringing an uplifting dimension to the entire spectrum of community life.

Finally, and most important, education should enhance one’s ability to communicate the beautiful truths of Scripture, making one a persuasive Christian who presents his or her Master in a way that brings healing and strength to the hearer. The well-educated can thus provide leadership to the local church through the commitment of their time, talent, and resources, making the church a centerpiece of the community where wounds are healed, people matter, and help is always available. This is the very reason we have been given the opportunity to develop our talents—so that instead of serving ourselves, we may better know how to serve others.

Every educator at every level

must seek to convey this vision and the need for our young people to develop the talents God has given them. Teachers, your students will not understand the importance of these matters unless you draw the picture clearly for them. It is your responsibility to create in each young person a desire and determination to learn how to better serve God and humankind.—N.C.S. □

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## **Computing With Class**

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tractor feed or sheet feeder options and the more sophisticated ones are already equipped to interface via RS-232-C standard serial port or parallel interface. If your application calls for high volume, multiple parts, speed, and tractor feed, you’ll find the selection and price of dot matrix printers make them a good choice.

### **Ink Jet Printers**

Like laser printers, ink jet printers are quiet, boast incredible quality, and offer other benefits over traditional technologies—no ribbon to dry out, snag, or run gray. However, like laser printers, ink jets can only make one copy at a time, and to date they haven’t got tractor feeds down to a science. The ink is more or less a liquid; therefore, instead of ribbon problems, you may have clogging problems. The good news is that replacing an ink cartridge means replacing the entire mechanism that could be clogged, so maintenance may not be the hassle implied.

### **Daisy Wheel Printers**

These kind of stole the thunder away from the tried-and-true IBM ball technology. They’re faster, quieter, require a much less sophisticated movement mechanism, and