

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE MARKETING MIX STRATEGIES
UTILIZED BY NORTH AMERICAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Educators often misunderstand marketing. Frequently it is viewed as simply advertising or selling. Marketing is far more encompassing. A closer look at the components of marketing reveals an involvement in virtually all aspects of private school operations. Other than miracles or providential guidance, a solid business plan, based on the “marketing mix,” might contribute most to the overall growth and customer satisfaction within a Christian school.

This dissertation is a qualitative study designed to research the marketing mix strategies of private, Christian schools throughout America and Canada. This research effort was designed to collect both descriptive and historical data. A key emphasis of this study investigated Christian school awareness and usage of marketing mix strategies.

The data gathered from interviews, questionnaires, and published reports provided the basis for determining: (1) That the eight marketing mix components and strategies highlighted within the study were evident in the operations of Christian schools. (2) That only 15% of the Christian schools involved in this study operated with written marketing plans. (3) The individuals responsible for developing Christian school marketing plans were primarily administrative staff. (4) Successful marketing operations were identified and word of mouth advertising efforts were found to be the most successful among respondents. (5) Christian school marketing strategies were also identified where efforts faltered. In addition (6) Christian schools rarely utilized internal marketing strategies to reach or influence their own students.

CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Other than providential guidance, a solid business plan based on marketing mix components can contribute most to the overall success and growth of Christian schools. This study has been designed to explore the different successful marketing mix strategies that have been utilized by Christian schools throughout the United States and Canada and expose marketing strategies that have failed. Whether written marketing plans are utilized within Christian school settings is also be explored.

For the purposes of this study, a new marketing plan has been introduced to assist in the identification process of which marketing mix components and strategies are evident in the operations of Christian schools. Neil H. Borden (1964) originally coined the marketing mix term in his article *'The Concept of the Marketing Mix.'* The components included in the mix are *product, price, place, and promotion*; these are regularly referred to as the “four P’s” of the marketing mix and each one has an abundance of sub-sets. For example, the promotional area includes all aspects of advertising, public relations, promotions, and publicity. Borden’s marketing mix design has been challenged over the years but still remains as the cornerstone to marketing studies and it serves as the basis to this dissertation. However, in an attempt to enhance the effectiveness of this study and provide a more detailed marketing mix plan for Christian school operations, four additional strategies are explored for implementation into the marketing mix, these are; partnering, processes, possibilities, and pleasing to God. From this point, the marketing mix strategies for Christian schools may be represented by Borden’s four original components along with four new implementation strategies. These marketing mix strategies will be referred to as the OCTOPUS plan hereafter. OCTOPUS is an acronym that represents the phrase, “Operational characteristics tactfully outlining productive, uplifting schools.”

Marketing is far more than just a fancy word for advertising. It is far more encompassing, so much so, that the components of marketing might be observable in the operations of most private schools. Levinson (1998, p. 8) says, “Marketing is absolutely every bit of contact any part of a business has with any segment of the public.” He feels that marketing is a circle that begins with ideas for generating revenue and continues with the goal of amassing a large number of repeat and referral customers. Levinson believes that if marketing is not a circle, it is instead a straight line that leads directly into the bankruptcy courts.

Beckwith (1997, p. 50) urges, “Study every point at which your company makes contact with a prospect. The receptionist, business cards, buildings, brochures, public appearances, or presentations are just a few points of contact that help people to decide whether or not they feel comfortable to do business. Each of these points of contact must be studied from a customer’s perspective and then improved significantly.”

Bangs (1998) believes that good marketing calls for performing many small tasks thoroughly and intelligently. Great marketing requires that the tasks be done well, that there are good products and services, and a knowing of customers and prospects better than the competition does. McDonald and Keegan (2002) feel that marketing matches the capabilities of a company with the needs and wants of its customers to achieve a mutually beneficial relationship.

According to numerous professional marketers, a clearly designed, well-written marketing plan is where strategic planning should begin. The marketing mix has served as a foundation to such planning since 1964. McKinley, Florence, and Design (1996) view the marketing mix as a series of separate initiatives, each tallying to a conceptual whole – the sale of products or services being offered. While there is no linear structure to the mix, there is, as in a game of chess, a clear and well-planned goal toward which all the different influences move in their own, unique fashion.

Prushan (1997) proposes that marketing is all about customers, finding them, satisfying them and keeping them. Without customers, there is no need to operate. Until prospects become customers in sufficient quantity to exceed business expenses, an adequate marketing job has not been conducted. It is important to remember that all products and services are intended to satisfy the needs or wants of customers. Efforts to define the market are always in terms of customers. Promotional messages are intended to attract and influence customers. Prices and tuitions are to be paid by customers. All inside efforts, even those that seem unrelated to marketing, should be focused on satisfying customers and meeting or exceeding their needs. It is worth repeating that marketing is all about building positive customer relations and communications. Marketing should be viewed as an integral component to all Christian schools.

Throughout this study, attempts were made to identify Christian school marketing operations that serve as components within the OCTOPUS plan. Due to the nature of this research effort, neither proven tests nor models were available for this doctoral candidate to reference or resource. Therefore, a questionnaire was designed to specifically answer the research questions of this report. By interviewing and collecting descriptive, historical data from colleagues that are directly responsible for the marketing operations of participating Christian schools, efforts were made to showcase positive marketing strategies and expose potential marketing pitfalls that Christian educators have experienced. The surveyed schools were asked if written marketing plans have been developed, shared with the staff, and utilized for current operations. Participants were also asked if they are in agreement with all eight of the identified marketing mix components as highlighted in the OCTOPUS plan. The research data was collected by utilizing phone interviews and Email surveys. The study population was limited to schools that have embraced the Internet for communication purposes and had the technological capabilities to allow for the remote gathering and sharing of research data.

Statement of the Problem

Christian schools need to focus on target marketing their efforts to the niche markets of specific identifiable customers (McCarthy & Perreault, 1984). There are many important elements to consider in defining the marketplace, but the bottom line is customer needs. Whether or not customers' needs are currently being satisfied should be the number-one priority of any organization (Parmerlee, 2000). There are no absolutes in marketing for private schools. A marketing mix that works for one school may fail miserably for another. Efforts to sell educational products and services generally do not work well with mass marketing efforts aimed at everyone. Marketing efforts should start with a sound recognition of customer needs and then work backwards to devise products and services to satisfy those needs (Peter & Donnelly, 1992). In this manner, private schools can presently satisfy customers in a more efficient manner as well as anticipate future services and opportunities.

More than six million students, 11.5 percent of America's elementary and secondary school population, attended private schools in 2003-04 according to a report released by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (CAPE, 2003). The ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International, 2003) reports their offices provide local services to more than 5,000 pre K-12 schools in 106 countries, impacting over 1,000,000 student lives worldwide. These statistics are impressive, yet they reveal that 88.5 percent of American students still attend public schools. The problem herein is that public schools in the U.S. are obligated by law to be religiously neutral. In Canada, some provinces have begun to embrace Society partnerships with Christian schools in an effort to be more accommodating. However, there are still additional fees required for attendance and the schools remain viewed as Christian entities. Could parents and students be made aware that Christian schools offer a better alternative than general public education? By utilizing field-tested marketing strategies,

Christian schools may be able to accomplish greater and more prudent marketing efforts. This in turn might allow reaching more students so they can learn the Word of God.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to answer five specific research questions, listed on page 8 of this study. It was purposefully designed in order to explore and possibly enhance the overall services and business operations of Christian schools. This effort should provide information leading to the best possible educational opportunities of current clients. The data from this study should also provide schools with information to better position themselves and thereby attract additional students. By researching the marketing operations of Christian schools, trends and opportunities are highlighted and shared so all may benefit. Schools that draw from the marketing experiences of others may be able to avoid unsuccessful strategies, emulate profitable ventures at reduced costs, and embrace marketing opportunities with fewer uncertainties. The shared data is drawn from and adapted to serve the individual niche markets of Christian schools. A niche market is a group that is large enough to justify and support operations.

Another aspect of this study sought to identify whether Christian schools conduct their operations in accord with written marketing plans. Prushan (1997, p. 47) believes, “If a marketing plan is not written down, it is not a plan, it is simply a dream. When it comes to business, converting dreams to reality involves setting goals and putting into gear the actions that will close in on those goals.” The whole process is called planning, and a written marketing plan that is based on the marketing mix is the end product of that process. McDonald and Keegan (2001, p. 214) also believe that a written plan is critical for success. They feel, “A written marketing plan is an invaluable tool because it serves as a record of the key facts, assumptions, and rationale of the marketing strategy.”

Research Questions

1. Are marketing mix components and strategies evident in the operations of Christian schools?

2. Do Christian schools operate with written marketing plans?
3. Who is responsible for developing a Christian school's marketing plans?
4. Can successful marketing operations be identified?
5. Can marketing strategies be identified that have failed?

Relevance of the Study

Marketing at Christian schools can be viewed as a prerequisite for survival in the competitive field of education. Thus, research into the marketing of private schools and its implications on high quality education is both relevant and opportune. Today's customers are becoming harder to please. They are smarter, more price conscious, more demanding, less forgiving, and many more competitors with equal or better offers approach them. The challenge, according to Gitomer (1998), is not to produce satisfied customers; several competitors can do this. The challenge is to find and produce delighted and loyal customers (Kotler, 2003). By exploring the research questions listed above, this study can hopefully assist and serve Christian schools as a practical reference resource to strengthen their future marketing efforts. As Dr. Janet Scaglione, a University of South Florida Business education professor, often said, "A project should be real, relevant, and rigorous."

Definitions and Marketing Terms

This study report was designed to be reader friendly. Explanations and definitions for marketing terms follow and are provided throughout the text. The definitions were gathered from the American (AMA) and Canadian Marketing Associations (CMA).

Marketing Mix	Factors on which a firm should establish operational decisions: product, price, place, and promotion
Four P's of Marketing	Product (service), price, promotion, and place; these are the original four components of the marketing mix
Product	The commodity or service offered
Price	The compensation required in exchange for a product or service

Promotion	The combination of advertising, personal selling, publicity, etc., used to communicate with customers and prospects
Place	Distribution of a product or service (where transactions occur)
Partnering	Mutually beneficial, rewarding arrangements
Processes	The way tasks are expected to be completed
Possibilities	Areas of chance- a SWOT analysis should be used to identify an organizations strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
Pleasing	To win approval, from God foremost - then all the stakeholders (i.e. customers, prospects, employees, volunteers, and supporters)
Positioning	Efforts used to build and support consumer impressions of a product, service, or company
Product Differentiation	An attempt to show how a product or service varies from a competitor's - and its benefits and advantages
Marketing Planning	Components of the marketing mix are utilized to establish strategic objectives that support an organization in the positioning and branding efforts of its products, services, and overall image.
Marketing Strategy	A plan based on the elements of the marketing mix in order to cultivate viable target markets (establish a customer base)
Advancement office	An alternative title that some schools have chosen to use rather than marketing department
Development	An alternative title for a school marketing department
Cost per inquiry (CPI)	A simple arithmetical formula derived by dividing the total cost of a mailing or an advertisement by the number of inquiries received.
Cost per thousand (CPM)	A standard measurement to display the cost of using a media vehicle to reach 1,000 people. The M (mille) = 1,000 in Latin.
Customer profile	A statistical picture of the typical user of products/services; includes demographic and psychographic descriptions.

Demographics	Socio-economic characteristics; The study of total size, sex, territorial distribution, age, composition, and other characteristics of human populations; the analysis of a population make-up
Psychographics	Data that displays how people live, their interests, and likes. An AIO, or life style analysis can display <u>A</u> ctivities, <u>I</u> nterests, and <u>O</u> pinions information.
Target Market	Particular segment of population on which efforts are focused to satisfy that submarket in order to accomplish set profit objectives
Niche Market	An identifiable and serviceable market segment, sufficiently sized for profitable operations – of less interest to major competitors.
OCTOPUS plan	<u>O</u> perational <u>C</u> haracteristics <u>T</u> actfully <u>O</u> utlining <u>P</u> roductive, <u>U</u> plifting <u>S</u> chools. This marketing plan includes: product, price, place, promotion, partnering, processes, possibilities, and most importantly –pleasing to God

CHAPTER II

Literary Research

An abundance of marketing resources are readily available for business applications. Unfortunately, most of the information is not directly related to Christian school operations. This literature review is therefore designed to glean pertinent information from books, journals, and the Internet that can be applied to Christian school marketing mix strategies. The "four P's" of the marketing mix: product, price, place, and promotion are each reviewed in detail. Four additional marketing mix components have been added to the marketing mix for this study: partnership, process, possibilities, and pleasing. According to D'Amico and Corbett (1987, p. 25), "Good ideas do not work everywhere." They argue that schools are unique. No two are the same, and any promising practice must be adapted to fit the individual school. When promising marketing mix strategies are not adapted to satisfy local community needs, disappointments follow.

Solid marketing opportunities exist when groups of sufficient size are identified whose needs are going unsatisfied (Kotler, 1999). This project has been designed to provide valuable marketing information to Christian schools that aspire to grow or maintain a full enrollment. The following literature review is intended to bestow such data and support a foundation for the conduct of this research study. This researcher has strived to define the strategic marketing mix components that have been identified for Christian school operations. The questions for the administrator interviews are derived from these findings.

According to Stephenson and Otterson (1995), satisfied-plus customers can motivate employees by giving direct feedback that their work is valued and worthwhile. Satisfied-

plus customers can also generate new leads and ideas for new products and services. By satisfying and exceeding customer expectations, not only will a strong customer base be established, the staff will also be energized and motivated to a higher level. They believe that all parts of the organization need to be included in, be responsible for, and be knowledgeable about the school's marketing process to enhance the marketing efforts and make them more effective. McDonald and Keegan (2002, p. 6) feel, "The first priority in the strategic marketing plan process is to have a strategy and a plan and then communicate it to the entire organization." This action will require a certain degree of faith to be entrusted in the school's workforce. If employees are treated as valued partners, a school can exponentially increase its marketing brain trust at no additional cost. Conversely, it could be argued that faith without good workers is dead.

According to Gray (1991, p. 27), "Marketing orientation in an educational organization is one in which the interests and needs of the students as customers is central. Other clients, notably parents and employers, are also recognized. Due attention is also given to their needs and concerns. These needs are regarded as the central reason for an organization's existence. By looking for ways in which its resources might be used to provide new kinds of services to new groups of users, viable income opportunities may be found. A marketing perspective is also concerned with enhancing the corporate image of an organization and of the services in general. A concern for customer satisfaction includes the encouragement and promotion of the view that educational provision is not just a matter of current consumption, a major component of user satisfaction, but is also an investment in the future." These attitudes are translated into action through the activities and behaviors of the entire school's staff.

"Marketing research could be used to better identify a school's current customer base and potential opportunities within the local community. Marketing research could also be used in evaluating school communications, promotional efforts, school policies, and a number of other school operations. Schools pride themselves on being purveyors of

knowledge, but the collective talents of their own staffs are often untapped during the development or refinement of marketing plans. School administrators could embrace the talents of the school staff,” (Spring Branch ISD, 2005, p. 1). By seeking input from all the available school stakeholders, great opportunities might be identified and acted upon. They feel problems may proactively be addressed and mitigated or eliminated before incident.

If a school were to need additional marketing expertise for projects or planning, these services are available from many sources. Johanna Lockhart (2005) provides a service that allows school employees to learn about marketing. She conducts workshops on marketing at a paying school’s location. The price for this full day seminar is \$2,200 for up to 22 people, there is an additional cost of \$90 for any additional participants. Ms. Lockhart states on her website, hisdmarketing.org/MYS.htm, that her work experience has been valuable in developing a marketing seminar so schools could implement and maintain strategies to meet their specific needs. Another marketing firm, GraceWorks Ministries (2005), hopes to help develop 10,000 outstanding Christian schools by 2045. Their website offers to conduct a marketing audit along with marketing consulting services for less than the tuition of one student. Schools may also wish to contract local marketing firms for assistance in developing marketing mix strategies. Kevin Lockerbie (2005), the president of Pedeia, Inc, shared that his firm’s task is to enhance a school's mission, develop its more effective management, promote its successful marketing, encourage its strategic and long-range master planning, and increase the money the school receives in gift support and endowments.

The United States Small Business Administration operates SBDCs, Small Business Development Centers, which provide a wide variety of information, guidance, and services to those involved in entrepreneurial efforts at little to no cost. These centers are a cooperative effort of the private sector, the educational community and federal, state and local governments. Their Internet web addresses are <http://sbdnet.utsa.edu> and

<http://www.sba.gov>. Canadian school administrators may seek additional support through information provided at <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca>, a website that is provided and maintained by Industry Canada. It is important to note that some of these government offices may refuse to provide their services if they deem a Christian school as being exclusionary.

The fees for external marketing services vary widely, from free to more costly as mentioned above. The results of these services can also vary widely. Efforts for planning marketing strategies internally will cost time and effort. The levels of expertise and market savvy will depend on the staff and stakeholders of each individual school. Whether to design a marketing plan in-house, internally, or to contract, externally, for such services should be thought through carefully and prayerfully on a case-by-case basis.

To improve in their chances of success, schools should have measurable plans in place that are based on sound marketing principles. Trying to achieve success otherwise would be similar to a commercial airlines pilot taking off, to an unknown and random destination without a flight plan. First, who would be willing to purchase a ticket for such a flight? Secondly, would all of the passengers be pleased with the eventual destination? Well thought out marketing plans based upon marketing mix strategies help to avoid turbulence, increase customer satisfaction, and maximize revenue. McDonald (2002, p. 52) stated, “A written strategic marketing plan is the backdrop against which operational decisions are taken. Its major function is to determine where the organization is, where it wants to go and how it can get there.”

Marketing Mix Components

Marketing includes an organization’s name, the decision of whether a product or service will be offered, the methods involved, the colors, size, and shape of an offering, the location of business, the advertising, the public relations, the training, the teachers, the coaches, the presentations, the telephone inquiries, the problem solving, the growth plan, and the follow-up (Levinson, 1998). Very often, the only factor that determines

success or failure is the way in which a product or service is marketed according to Levinson. He feels that it is not possible to succeed without marketing and the more aware one becomes of marketing, the more attention will be paid to it. This increased attention to detail will result in better marketing efforts.

Schulz (2001, p. xi) says, “Successful organizations don’t owe their greatness to luck. They’re on top because they know more about their consumers than the competition and they execute their marketing efforts better.” He believes that there are very few genuinely original strategies. Most great thoughts are hijacked from somewhere else and just executed better in a different way. This philosophy ties in nicely with Ecclesiastes 1:9 which proclaims that there is no new thing under the sun. Schulz suggests a quick way to scan for any competitors and their marketing plans is to browse the yellow pages in a phone book. When seeking for sources of marketing inspiration, peruse other service provider ads in fields unrelated to education.

Seth Godin (2003, p.11) stated, “Among the people who might buy your product, most will never hear about it.” In order for a school to grow, others must know. It is imperative that Christian schools serve their current customers as children of the King, as they ultimately are. Devrye (2001) points out that it costs five times more to obtain a new customer than to retain an existing one. She also advises to make it easy for customers to do business. Jesus has commanded in John 13:34 (Bible Gateway) that Christians are to love one another, just as He loved us. Christian schools need to obey this commandment by applying an equal portion of practice to their own teachings. Brubaker and Christopher (1997, p. 165) believe that, “An understanding of educational principles and philosophy will allow designers to create the appropriate environments to support the needs of students.” The marketing mix of a school should compliment and seamlessly fit within a school’s philosophy and charter, if it does not, problems and conflicts are sure to follow.

Based upon the research, it would be prudent for schools to identify and tailor the four original components of the time-tested marketing mix: product, price, place, and

promotion to their individual operations. This doctoral candidate suggests that Christian schools might be even better served by embracing “the OCTOPUS Plan for Christian Schools.” OCTOPUS serves as an acronym representing: Operational characteristics tactfully outlining productive, uplifting schools. The plan focuses on the marketing mix components and strategies of: product, price, place, promotion, partnering, processes, possibilities, and most importantly – pleasing to God.

Product

The product offering of most Christian schools is actually a service, educating and preparing students for a better future. This service should be Biblically centered and focused on much higher goals than just helping one attain earthly success. From this common point, school differentiation is limited primarily by either a lack of funding or creativity. Christian schools may operate as college preparatory schools, trade or technology oriented schools, distance education schools, single sex schools for boys or girls, special needs schools, preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, full service k-12 schools, or a myriad of other types of schools. A Christian school might chose to operate as a hybrid school or develop entirely new educational products and service delivery techniques.

Phillips and Rasberry (2005, p. 100) believe, “A clear, creative definition of an organization serves as an essential basis for a marketing action plan, and that you simply cannot develop concrete marketing steps until you know who you are aiming at and what, exactly you offer. Once you know what your business does, you can focus on those elements that make it unique.” Prushan (1997) proposes that organizational mission statements should be thrown away and position statements be used in their place. He feels that by thinking through what a school is, what it does, and how it is viewed in the marketplace; a short, well-written descriptive position statement is far more effective than wasting time to create a flowery sounding mission statement.

The product/service component of a marketing mix is crucially important. Weakness in this one area could derail and possibly lead to an eventual school failure, even if all of the other marketing mix components were optimally being utilized. Bangs (2002, p. 1) feels, “The best place to start a marketing plan is at the beginning, with an understanding of what you hope to accomplish in your business and a feel for the strategies that will best help you to achieve those goals.” He believes that by concentrating attention on the best markets, customers, products, and services, the chances of success skyrocket. Prushan (1997, p.115) points out that every successful program has one common denominator – enough customers who are willing to pay for products and services that make for profitable operations. General Electric once had a slogan that stated, “Progress is our most important product.” IBM has touted the slogan, “IBM means service.” Without a good product or service, a slogan is hollow and meaningless. As stated above, Christian schools should begin any marketing efforts within this area and develop their offerings according to their clientele’s wishes.

Price

Schulz (2001, p. 85) argues, “Consumers don’t shop for lowest cost. They shop for the highest value.” In this case, value is perceived as either a fair price or a good return on investment. Tuition makes a critical statement to a consumer about the value being offered. If a low price is set, consumers assume a very modest opinion of the value. If the services are offered at a higher price, consumers infer that a school has a high value and that it truly delivers on the benefits. Schulz believes that good marketing skills help to build and strengthen perceived values.

Profitability and Christian schools are not often mentioned in the same sentence. Psalm 128:2 from the New International Version of the Bible proclaims, “You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.” The Bible encourages Christians to be industrious and prosperous. Leviticus 25:17 NIV (Bible Gateway) states, “Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God.”

Proverbs 28:20 NIV (Bible Gateway) instructs, “A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.” The Word of God should guide all business decisions and serve as an integral component of the marketing mix. It should be obvious, that if a Christian school continually spends more than it receives to provide services, the school is doomed to fail. Operating revenues must meet or exceed expenses.

“In spite of all of the textbook discussions about pricing, all the articles in academic journals, and all the formulas, graphs, and charts explaining pricing techniques and customer response to various pricing scenarios,” Prushan (1997, p.128) feels that, “Pricing is still more of an art than a science.” Devrye (2001, p. 14) points out that it is critical to plan for the future of an organization. She emphasizes the importance of having the provisions necessary to carry on, especially through tough times. A Biblically based vision, accompanied by a well-designed marketing plan, can help to optimize operations and produce the rewarding and lasting results for Christian schools to carry on.

According to the 1999 National Public Opinion Poll on Perceptions of Independent Education, public appreciation of independent schools is increasing. The National Association of Independent Schools (2002) conducted this 1999 study. A majority of the respondents believed independent schools did a better job than public schools in many key areas, as displayed in Appendix C. Thirty percent of the survey respondents said they would choose an independent school for their children’s education “if cost were not a factor.” Those who establish Christian school pricing policies should consider financial strategies that could help families overcome financial obstacles to their services by exploring win-win strategies. Grants, tuition assistance, and loans are just a few of the options available to expand and enhance a school’s reach to families in need of financial aid.

Place

Genesis 28:16-17 of the NIV (Bible Gateway) reveals, “When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was

afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." The property of a Christian school needs to be treated and reflected as Holy ground. Respect and dignity for a school's property should be emphasized and observable. "Ray Kroc, founder of McDonalds, used to grab a mop and clean up when he would visit one of his restaurants if he felt it wasn't up to snuff," (Levine, 2005, p. 22).

Phillips and Rasberry (1997, p. 34) believe, "A business appearance should conform to, or exceed the norms of others. It should be squeaky clean and have an appropriate smell. Schools should reflect professionalism and be uncluttered." They feel that sloppy storage areas and restrooms, messy bookshelves, boxes of files piled in inappropriate places, and half-dead plants are things that can be overlooked, but are sure to turn off customers. Whether in business for some time or just starting, review all of the key elements of the school's appearance regularly. By pretending to be a customer, it is possible to question if the appearance of the school would inspire trust and confidence, or not.

When a school's appearance is not what clients or prospects expect, there is risk of making them uncomfortable. When concerns outweigh comfort, there is a greater risk of lost business. It should be a goal in any marketing plan to go beyond the industry norms and then communicate these improvements to the customers. Outdoor signage, landscaping, building architecture, cleanliness of grounds, and the appearance of surrounding properties are all reflections of a school's marketing efforts. Christian schools should regularly assess these characteristics from a customer perspective (Timm, 2002).

Promotion

Promotion is the act of making people aware of the school, the services, and what can be done to help them. It informs individuals why they should come to the school being promoted for these solutions, rather than the competition. It also reassures current

customers that they made the correct decision by coming in the first place (Prushan, 1997). The marketing mix promotional element consists of advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, and publicity. All should be in balance with the other components of the marketing mix. By identifying specifically who current stakeholders are, identifying who future stakeholders will be and then defining these needs and wants; Parmerlee (2000) maintains that an organization can better determine how to reach these targeted people and acquire or retain them as clients and stakeholders.

Advertising can be conducted in a number of different Medias. Levinson (1998) described some of these in his book *Guerilla Marketing*. Radio is considered the most intimate media tool for advertising. This is due to listeners often being alone in their homes or cars. Magazine readers often become more involved in the content than a newspaper reader does. Whether a reader buys or subscribes to a magazine, they tend to take a good, long time to read them. Levinson (2005, Para 18) believes, "Television is still the undisputed heavyweight champion of marketing." He feels that television allows words to be combined with music and motion pictures to get into the minds of potential customers. Levinson argues that TV ads are very costly and they must be done properly or not at all.

Levinson (1998) feels that direct mail allows for the most precise niche marketing, serving the needs of small groups, and it can be a very effective tool if used properly. He believes signs and billboards are superb at reminding people of products and services, but they do not work well by themselves. Levinson feels that canvassing takes the most time, but it is highly effective. It has few limitations and allows for personal contact. He claims that by using other advertising concurrently with canvassing the stranger element can be reduced.

Yellow pages marketing and classified advertisements hit the very hottest of prospects. Nevertheless, Levinson points out that this is also one of the most confrontational advertising arenas, as all of the competitors can be found there as well.

Brochures offer the greatest opportunity for providing detailed information about products or services. Telephone marketing can be even more intimate than radio advertising, but it is often viewed as invasive unless pre-qualification techniques were used to create the calling list. Tiny signs on bulletin boards serve to make the organization a part of the community. These ads are extremely inexpensive and they help to build confidence.

The Internet has recently become a major advertising and recruiting tool for many Christian schools. In a recent article Levinson (2005, Para 18) stated, "I love online marketing so much that I'm nearly bursting with enthusiasm for it. I know it's gonna make every other medium stronger and more effective." However, there are still some Christians who refuse to embrace this technology from personal religious viewpoints.

There are a number of other forms of advertising that range from airplanes to zoos. Balloons have been used to spread advertisement messages, as have buses, billboards, barns, and a bevy of others. A recent Pizza Hut advertising campaign had planned to project an image onto the moon, but instead they refocused their efforts a little more down to earth. Outlandish campaigns can grab attention and free publicity, but any promotional effort needs to maintain consistency with the school charter (Prushan, 1997, p. 8).

"Public relations campaigns should be designed to develop momentum," according to Schulz (2001, p. 179). He feels that by overlapping efforts, consumers will receive new and slightly different news about a school from many different sources. Levinson (1998) suggests that positive news should be publicly reported by writing a piece to different news agencies. Such a report is called a publicity release. The releases should be addressed to as specific a news department as possible, sports, entertainment, business, or whatever, and preferably to the specific editor of that department. A release for newspapers might be longer and more detailed than a release for radio or TV. It is

important to post the date in the upper right corner of a release. A contact name and phone number should also be included for any additional information.

As with all of the other marketing mix elements, it is crucial that school employees are completely aware of all the ongoing marketing programs. All school representatives must positively reflect and support the messages being conveyed in the promotional efforts. Ross (2000) points out that every organization is the sum of the people who work there and employee attitude plays a big role. Advice for Christian schools can be found in the NIV version of the Bible at Psalms 75:4-7 (Bible Gateway), it states, “To the arrogant I say, 'Boast no more,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horns. Do not lift your horns against heaven; do not speak with outstretched neck.' No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.” Jesus stated in Matthew 5:37 (Bible Gateway), “Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” Christian schools must always remember that they are accountable to a much Higher Authority and it would be terrible for a Christian school to appear as if it were engaging in false advertising campaigns.

Partnering

When both the value of vision and the value-added dimension of a covenant are present, Sergiovanni (1992) has observed teachers, students, and parents responding with increased motivation and commitment. Their performance was well beyond the ordinary school. For this to take place, every parent, teacher, student, and administrator should be viewed as an interdependent member of the school’s covenantal community and that every action taken in the school must seek to advance the welfare of their community.

Sergiovanni (1992) points out schools have a tendency to focus knowledge, attention, and skills so narrowly that principals and teachers become incapable of thinking and acting beyond their prescribed roles. Instead, those involved should be invited to accept higher levels of responsibility for their own behavior and for the school itself. In many

ways, respect is a form of empowerment. When one feels that he counts, there is a greater likelihood to take an interest in what is going on. A binding and solemn agreement emerges. This agreement grows to become the school's covenant. This candidate believes that such a plan could be based on a highly personalized marketing mix. By utilizing such a strategy, a value system could be established that would form the basis of all operational decisions and actions.

Partnerships could be expanded beyond the borders of a school building. Local and national businesses, organizations, and community members may be contacted and recruited for volunteer and partnership programs. Senior volunteers are about twice as likely as non-volunteers to be church members (Self & Wymer, 1999). If asked, many seniors would feel honored to be included. Often these services could be provided for at little to no cost. Many local businesses seek dependable employees, so referral partnerships are a possibility within this area. Products and services can be sought through win-win partnership strategies. Reward programs can be established. McDonald & Keegan (2002) believe, "Creating situations that bring buyers and sellers together is the basis of marketing." They feel that by thinking like a marketer, opportunities can be identified, proposed, and then acted upon. History has revealed it is critical to remain focused on the school's core beliefs and values. Extra revenue or cost savings gained from unethical partnerships or associations are not worth diluting the school's image.

Processes

Mark Perna (2005) who founded Tools for Schools, a full-service marketing firm to the career and technical education field, is always amazed to see the huge dollar amounts spent by schools, businesses, and large corporations to market their products and services, only to have incoming prospect calls handled unprofessionally. Perna points out that customer service people are the first line of sales and revenue growth. Front office receptionists and call handlers form strong first impressions that cannot be left to chance. In order to lead potential students or customers through any of the information-gathering

or sign-up processes as courteously as possible, Perna feels these employees need proper training. It does not matter how many calls a school receives through a well-planned marketing campaign if the customer service staff cannot help a prospective business customer or help a student enroll with confidence and satisfaction. Perna believes that internal marketing processes must constantly be reviewed for improvement and never taken for granted.

Possibilities

This OCTOPUS plan component focuses on current operations and potential opportunities. A proven tool for this evaluation process is the SWOT analysis. A SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. A SWOT analysis helps organizations evaluate the environmental factors and internal situations that they are facing. In this case, strengths and weaknesses are attributes that measure the internal capability of a school. Opportunities and threats refer to how the external environment affects the organization. Once key issues have been identified, they should be applied to an organization's marketing objectives (Marketing Teacher, 2005).

Nick Vasilieff (2000), the president of Third Party International, a business consulting, marketing, management, and sales organization specializing in technical products, believes that even though it is nearly impossible to know exactly what is working and what is not working in marketing, it can generally be determined which actions are producing results. A school can build its marketing campaigns on sound principals and measure results on point-of-contact feedback. Vasilieff explains that an overall campaign is needed to contribute to the results of any one activity. Any changes should be applied slowly and designed for the long term. He believes that decisions ought to be based on collected data, common sense, and input from experienced professionals. By adhering to the above rules, it is possible for a Christian school to be very well positioned for gaining the best returns from any marketing investment.

Pleasing God

According to Christian belief and practice, a Christian school must foremost be pleasing to God. Without His blessings, a school will not succeed. Therefore, all marketing efforts of Christian schools must be Biblically sound. Any unethical marketing practice could lead to catastrophic consequences. Every operational function of a school should be regularly reviewed to ensure optimum experiences. The Amplified Bible states in Ephesians 5:9 (Bible Gateway), “And try to learn [in your experience] what is pleasing to the Lord [let your lives be constant proofs of what is most acceptable to Him].”

Anderson and Zemke (2003) point out that in the late 1990’s, professional business watchers relearned that organizations that had dedicated themselves to working hard at giving their customers superior service were producing better financial results. These organizations grew faster and were more profitable than other organizations that tried to give their customers as little as possible. Companies that emphasized pleasing service were starting to make more money than companies that did not. Researchers also noticed that successful service organizations had lower marketing costs, fewer upset and complaining customers, and more repeat business. Employee turnover and absenteeism were lower and morale and job satisfaction were higher in these same organizations.

Paul Young (2004), the President emeritus of the Southern Baptist Educational Center, points out that a school must display a good perceived value for the tuition dollars. He also states that Christian education is not just a ministry. It is an educational service that parents purchase. The parents and students of a private school must be treated like good customers or they really have no compelling reason to return. He feels that Christian schools must display value-added services in as many areas as possible. Those that strive to share God’s good news, to train their students for success, use marketing effectively, and treat customers according to Biblical precepts, grow in relation to the pleasing services they provide. Internal and external marketing helps all to see and share in a school’s success.

Young believes that internal marketing efforts insure strong and loyal customer and employee bases but external marketing must be conducted in order to provide the prospects for growth. An internal marketing approach provides information for those already involved in the school operations, such as current students, parents, staff, or even the Board. Internal marketing can help in gaining a positive, quality reputation within the organization. External marketing efforts provide background knowledge to the public and prospects about educational programs and services being offered by the school. By maximizing both internal and external marketing and customer satisfaction efforts, a Christian school can create a sense of teamwork and camaraderie that good organizations thrive on (Anderson & Zemke, 1991)

CHAPTER III

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the participants, describe the data gathering process, outline the process by which individual interviews were conducted, and delineate the procedures that were used for data collection and analysis. The primary objective of this study is to answer the following research questions: (1) Are marketing mix components and strategies evident in the operations of Christian schools? (2) Do Christian schools operate with written marketing plans? (3) Who is responsible for developing Christian school marketing plans? (4) Can successful marketing operations be identified? And (5) Can strategies be identified where marketing efforts have failed? By collecting and sharing this descriptive data, those in charge of Christian school marketing operations might be able to learn and apply successfully used marketing mix strategies to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of their own marketing efforts.

This dissertation is viewed as being a qualitative research report because qualitative research is typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world. "Qualitative studies may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" says Stake (1978, p. 5), and thus more meaningful. Qualitative data can more fully describe a phenomenon. Therefore, study design is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's perspective as well. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 120) state, "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it." Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning of phenomena, and the result of this type of research is "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). In this study, data is in the form of the participants' own words, direct quotations from documents were used to convey what the researcher had learned.

Even though This study primarily involves qualitative research methods, it may contain enough quantitative data to meet the mixed method procedure proposed by Gay and Airasian (2003, p. 184), which states, “Researchers creatively combine the elements of methods in any way that makes the best sense for the study they want to do. Their own limits are their own imagination and the necessity of presenting their findings convincingly.” Some researchers believe that qualitative and quantitative research can be effectively combined in the same research project (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Patton, 1990).

Russek and Weinberg (1993) claim that by using both quantitative and qualitative data, their study of technology-based materials for the elementary classroom gave insights that neither type of analysis could provide alone. A semi-structured questionnaire, displayed in Appendix A, served as a guide to gathering the descriptive, narrative, and historical data for this report. The data was collected from administrators, along with school personnel involved with marketing operations.

The only compensation offered for participation in the study was a copy of the final report. The descriptive and historical findings from this effort could be helpful to aspiring Christian schools in the development of their own successful marketing mix strategies. By exposing poor marketing execution, other schools might be able to avoid similar pitfalls. All those who agreed to be interviewed were treated with the utmost respect and any requests for anonymity were honored.

Description of Participants

Schools for this study have been selected from Internet searches, an ACSI (2005) member list, and a CSI (2005) member list, based upon school technological communications, such as web site and email capabilities, and geographic representation. Powell (1985, p. 62) explains, “The general rule of thumb for the size of a sample is, quite simply, the larger the better.” Babbie (1979, p. 273) states, “Probability samples of less than 100 are not likely to be very representative of the population. Yet there is no

point in utilizing a sample that is larger than necessary; doing so unnecessarily increases the time and money needed for a study.” Patton (2002, p. 245) said, “The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size.”

For this research effort, the operational marketing personnel from 200 American and Canadian Christian schools were offered the chance to contribute to this study. Participants could complete a telephone interview or a self-guided questionnaire. The same questionnaire was used for the data collection in both formats. The tabulated data in chapter four displays the statistical format usages. The questionnaire design details are presented in the next chapter section.

Participants were encouraged to be candid and comfortable with their responses. As mentioned earlier, anonymity had been offered in order to protect any individual or school identity. By participating and expounding with detailed information, Christian school marketing strategists can share their God given talents with their peers. By humbling oneself to share negative marketing experiences, dangers can be marked so others can avoid the same snares. Additional marketing information was gleaned from published marketing books, journals, and current articles to support and supplement the interview data.

Questionnaire

The interview questionnaire designed for this study is displayed in Appendix A. The design specifically leads towards answering the five research questions associated with this report. A detailed report of the questionnaire design is provided in Appendix B. Christian school administrators and marketing personnel were contacted via telephone and Email. They were asked an assortment of marketing mix strategy and demographic questions. Open-ended qualitative feedback was collected and recorded by the interviewer along with some quantitative data. Due to the busy nature of school

administrators and time constraints, some school personnel preferred to be contacted via electronic mail. The structural design of the administrator interview is defined as semi-structured. This design is defined by Gay and Airasian (2003, p. 211), “Questions and order of presentation are determined Questions and have open ends.”

Study Design

This study has been designed to serve as a qualitative, phenomenological research effort. In an attempt to understand the marketing operations of Christian schools, descriptive and narrative marketing data was collected from American and Canadian Christian school personnel in order to answer the following research questions:

1. Are marketing mix components and strategies evident in the operations of Christian schools?
2. Do Christian schools operate with written marketing plans?
3. Who is responsible for developing a Christian school’s marketing plans?
4. Can successful marketing operations be identified?
5. Can marketing strategies be identified that have failed?

Narrative and phenomenological strategies of inquiry through open-ended data collection were used in an attempt to identify any developing themes as described by Creswell (2003). A non-probability, purposeful sampling technique was chosen in order to obtain participants who held in-depth understanding. This method utilization ensured that everyone involved in the interviews met certain requirements and had experienced the phenomenon being studied, marketing operations of Christian schools (Patton 2002). All participants included in this study had a working knowledge of their school’s marketing efforts.

The contact list for this study was constructed from Internet searches that utilized the Boolean search terms of +“Christian school” and +largest. Schools were also selectively chosen from the ACSI (2005) and the CSI (2005) online school membership listings. Each selected school had to display technological capabilities either through Email usage

or Website development. VoIP, voice over Internet protocol, phone service was utilized for this study to reduce expenses. The telephone was a key instrument used in this research effort. Powell (1985, p. 111) stated, "Among the advantages of the phone interview is the significant savings in actual time and cost in contrast to the personal interview." Emails were also extensively used to send questionnaires and receive feedback.

Powell (1985, p. 61) believes, "Experience surveys gather and synthesize the experiences of specialists and/or practitioners in a particular field." He feels, "The researcher's primary interest is in gaining provocative ideas and useful insights." The survey questionnaire for this study has been developed in order to gather marketing mix strategies by using open-ended questions. Creswell (p. 54) believes "A qualitative study is like a documentary film that offers a fluid sense of development, allowing for movement and change. This form of study allows for a more meaningful study due to the personal nature of qualitative inquiry. In a qualitative research design, interviews may be used as the primary source of data collection." In this study, individual interviews are the dominant strategy of data collection. The data primarily contains descriptive and narrative feedback. It also contains some historical data and school demographic information. Efforts were made to obtain interviews in which participants felt comfortable to freely discuss their marketing experiences.

To determine their willingness to participate in this study an initial contact was established by the researcher. If an administrator agreed to be included in the study and was currently available, an interview was conducted immediately. A more convenient time would be scheduled otherwise. In some cases, provisions were made to allow marketing personnel to complete a self-directed survey. This offer was made in an attempt to improve the number of study participants by reducing stress and scheduling difficulties.

The SPSS student version 11.0 for Windows software program was utilized extensively to analyze the research data. It was used to help develop themes, graphs, and tables collected from the responses. Additional graphs were created within the Microsoft Word program. The dissertation committee assigned to this process helped to ensure the accuracy, and professionalism of the study.

Summary

This chapter has presented a description of the methodology utilized in this research effort. The purposes of this chapter were to identify the participants, and describe the data gathering processes used throughout this study. This description included an introduction, a profile of the participants, a questionnaire synopsis, and a study design.

Research has shown that Christian schools close due to poorly designed marketing strategies, weak leadership, and strong competition. One aspect of this study identifies such shortcomings so other Christian schools could avoid similar fates. Endeavors were also made to expose positively utilized marketing strategies of growing and vibrant Christian schools so these efforts could be emulated.

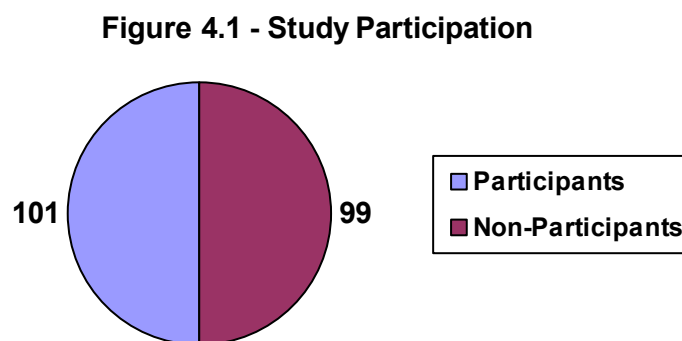
Unfortunately, there have been no observable marketing absolutes in Christian education other than a firm establishment on the Word of God. After thorough investigation by this author, a Christian school marketing plan has not been identified that can work everywhere. It is believed that to be successful, each school needs to prayerfully develop its own marketing mix, so it can honor God by best providing for the needs of the families and community it serves.

CHAPTER IV

Study Results

A questionnaire was designed in order to answer the research questions identified in Chapter 1 of this study. The findings from this effort are presented within this chapter. Feedback was sought from school administrators and personnel who were directly involved in the decision making process as related to their school's marketing operations. Professional and personal marketing viewpoints were gathered from willing Christian schools throughout the United States and Canada. Reflective and narrative feedback serves as the foundation of this report.

This chapter has been organized with multiple graphs and tables so the data may be displayed in an easy to read format. The findings presented are based upon the five research questions and demographic data as displayed in the questionnaire design, located within Appendix B. As expressed earlier, this study involved contacting 200 Christian schools across North America. Of those contacted via phone or Email, 101 individuals from these schools agreed to participate in this study through using open-ended



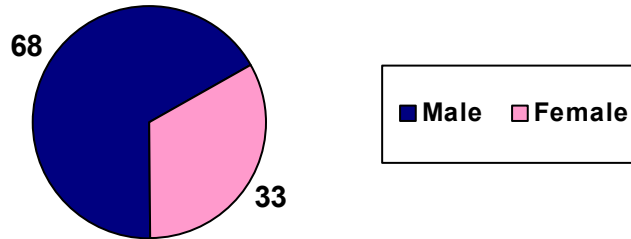
interviews and questionnaires. The study response rate equaled 50.5%. The average time needed to complete interviews or gather completed questionnaires from

participants was 14.87 days from the initial point of contact.

Demographic Data

The school personnel participating in this study served in a wide range of demographically diverse school systems. Of the school personnel who served as

Figure 4.2 - Gender of Participants



respondents to the questionnaire, 67.3% were male and 32.7% were female. The oldest school involved in the study served grades pre K - 12 in a Midwestern state. It was founded in 1948 and just

recently relocated to a new 108,000 sq. ft. facility in the suburbs. Four of the newest participating schools were founded in the 2000 school year. The schools had a mean average founding year of 1979. The largest percentage of participating schools, 32.7%, began their operations in the 1970's. Table 4.1 displays participating schools founding dates by decade and table 4.2 displays the school grades served.

Table 4.1 Participating Schools Decade of Founding

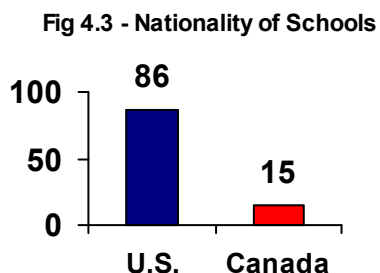
Decade	Schools Founded	Percent
1940's	4	4.0
1950's	3	3.0
1960's	11	10.9
1970's	33	32.7
1980's	26	25.7
1990's	20	19.8
2000's	4	4.0
Total	101	100.0

Table 4.2 Schools - Grades Served

Grades	Freq.	Percent
6-12	2	2.0
7-12	2	2.0
9-12	1	1.0
k-10	1	1.0
k-11	2	2.0
k-12	27	26.7
k-8	8	7.9
k-9	1	1.0
pk-12	40	39.6
pk-6	4	4.0
pk-8	11	10.9
pk-9	2	2.0

This research effort serves as a geographically diverse representation of Christian schools throughout North America. It contains at least one representative Christian school

from each of the 50 United States and 9 of the 10 Canadian Provinces. Newfoundland is the only province without a representative school. As displayed in figure 4.3, Eighty-six



of the participating schools were located within the U.S. and fifteen were located in Canada. Presentation of all research data from this study is grouped collectively, except tuition figures, which are displayed on a national basis due to currency differences.

The number of students enrolled in the schools varied widely from the smallest enrollment of eight students to a school with 2,950 students. Table 4.3 displays current enrollment data for the 2005-06 school year and Table 4.4 displays additional enrollment statistical data.

Table 4.3 Student Enrollment of Participating Schools

Student Enrollment	Frequency	Percent
< 149	18	17.8
150 -- 299	30	29.7
300 – 499	16	15.8
500 – 749	17	16.8
750 – 999	7	6.9
> 1000	13	12.9
Total	101	100.0

Table 4.4 Participating Schools Enrollment Statistics

Mean	505.77
Median	310.00
Mode *	130*
Range	2942
Minimum	8
Maximum	2950
Sum (total student enrollment)	51083

* Multiple modes exist, smallest is shown

Study participants were asked to identify whether their school was located in an urban, rural, or suburban area. In some cases, there were multiple facilities involved. Of the responses, the majority, 59.4%, reported that their school was located in a suburban setting. Those reporting an urban setting were 22.8% and schools in rural settings amounted to 13.9%. Four schools are not represented in the school settings data.

Interviewees identified that most of their school's family member households could be categorized as middle class. A large segment representing 80.2% of school families were identified as being upper-middle to middle class as shown in table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5 Family Member Socioeconomics

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	4.0	4.0
Upper	2	2.0	5.9
Upper-middle	30	29.7	35.6
Middle	51	50.5	86.1
Middle-lower	10	9.9	96.0
Lower	4	4.0	100.0
Total	101	100.0	

As mentioned earlier in the report, each participant was given the opportunity to complete the School Marketing Questionnaire with full or partial anonymity. Of the 101 respondents, only 9.9% asked or chose the option of complete secrecy. Fourteen participants, 13.9%, requested to have their personal names withheld. Seventy-seven, 76.2%, of the school participants did not issue any requests for anonymity or any other information to be withheld from this study.

Observable Marketing Areas

The first question of this study was designed to explore which marketing mix components and strategies are evident in the operations of Christian schools. The four accepted marketing mix components established by Borden in 1964 are product, price, place, and promotion. The "OCTOPUS plan," introduced in the School Marketing Questionnaire, includes the additional marketing strategies: partnering, processes,

possibilities, and being pleasing to God. Research question one was designed to find which, if any, of these eight components and strategies of the OCTOPUS plan could be observed within the operations of Christian schools.

Study participants were asked if they were in agreement with the eight components identified in the OCTOPUS plan. Ninety-four of the 101 schools were in agreement with the plan, six did not directly respond to the question, and only one participant opposed the plan. One participant exclaimed of the plan, “Yes, that’s WAY cool!” He then shared, “I’m eager to read the results of the entire study. I was a teacher, coach, assistant principal, and principal in the public schools for 20 years. God called me to this Christian school and I have served as superintendent for 6 years. I have learned much about marketing and fundraising in those years, and I have much to learn.” A Canadian respondent from a prairie province stated, “Yes, they sound great” when asked if she was in agreement with the eight focus areas of the OCTOPUS plan. A study participant from a southern state said, “I would be interested to learn more about this strategy.” A number of other participants also displayed an eagerness to learn more about the OCTOPUS plan.

The OCTOPUS plan acronym was not provided for participants in the questionnaire, so one school marketing leader revealed that he was not overly thrilled with the name of the plan. He stated, “It looks good – I don’t know if I would break down a plan exactly like this, but these are all important elements. I don’t see how the name does much to help communicate the essence of the plan...other than the fact that there are eight focus areas.” This respondent does make a very good point, that when taken at face value without an explanation, the term OCTOPUS plan may sound absurd for a Christian school marketing plan. However, the acronym, OCTOPUS was designed to be creative and catchy while focusing on the eight aforementioned marketing traits. OCTOPUS represents – operational characteristics tactfully outlining productive, uplifting schools. Chapter five of this study provides more details of the OCTOPUS plan and its significance and symbolisms.

Marketing for Christian schools throughout North America may be defined quite differently depending on a number of factors. In order to establish a base definition for marketing within this study, the School Marketing Questionnaire referred to the American Marketing Association. The AMA (2004) definition states, "Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders." Of the respondents commenting on this definition, 51 were in agreement with the AMA statement, four disagreed, and 46 made no direct comment. A survey respondent from the United States west coast stated, "Personally, I would include something about eternal value in my marketing definition." Others questioned whether marketing truly created value. The majority of responses to this question were simple yes or no answers. Some participants did provide their own marketing definitions.

When asked to define and explain how marketing was applied at his school, a respondent shared, "(Our school) views marketing in a holistic way. Everything we do, customer service, keeping facilities clean, quick turn-around in responding to phone messages or emails of prospective families, direct mail, television advertising, etc. is considered marketing at (our) Christian School. We have worked hard to create an image of excellence and understand that it only takes one bad experience to tear down what we have worked on."

Another respondent shared his view as, "Marketing is everything we do as a school. Greeting parents, students, athletics, fine arts, performing arts, and chapel services all encompass the marketing of our school. We market to existing families as well as to our region. We market externally through local media sources."

In order to present the data related to question one of this study, participant feedback is presented by utilizing the eight identified OCTOPUS plan focus areas: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Partnering, Processes, Possibilities, and Pleasing to God. This divided

format should provide a means to determine which marketing mix components and strategies are evident in the operations of Christian schools.

Product/Service Area

In exploring the product/service areas of Christian schools, Table 4.2, displayed on page 43, revealed a wide range of grade levels served at the participating schools. In marketing terms, product is defined as a commodity or service offered. Study participants were asked to describe what differentiated their school from others. A prairie province school offered, “We are a church school with unparalleled excellence, the largest of its kind in Canada. Our mission is to use an individualized learning system to develop each student’s Godly character, passion for excellence, and ability to influence others for righteousness. We develop character in our students through academics, team sports, and music. Our students consistently graduate with senior matriculation with scholarships.”

A New England school participant shared of his school, “(Our) Academy is an independent, Christian K–8 school. It provides an education that is academically excellent and distinctively Christian, per our mission statement. We have an excellent teacher to student ratio that insures that all students get a great deal of individualized attention. (Our school) is the first school in (our state) to be dually accredited, from both ACSI and NEASC. (Our school) offers a wide variety of extra – curricular activities, including several sports, two bands, mock trial, speech meet, and numerous other opportunities. Our middle school students recently scored at three-to-four grade levels above their own grade on standardized testing.”

A participant from central Canada stated of his school, “We have strong church support, low turn-over of key staff positions, the respect of students of the past 40 years, and we have an atmosphere of respect and balance.” Another study contributor answered, “Most parents we have spoken to about this issue have given the main reason of ‘family’. They feel that our school has created a good school family atmosphere, which they as

parents can be part of and involved. The small school setting and teachers who communicate with parents has created this atmosphere.”

One marketing decision maker stated in her response to why parents and students should choose her school over others, “We have a strong reputation in (our city) for excellent academic performance as well as spiritual development of our students. We are able to offer a full array of athletics, i.e., volleyball, football, basketball, softball, baseball, cheerleading, and golf. We have a spectacular athletic complex that covers 8 acres and includes football, baseball, and softball fields. Most importantly, I have the greatest staff in the world. They are extremely devoted to Christian education. The atmosphere at our school is wonderful. You can feel the energy. The mission of (our school) is to graduate Christian leaders who by their commitment to academic excellence and spiritual vitality will transform the world for Jesus Christ. That’s what we do.”

A respondent from the Great Lakes region shared, “US News and World Report listed (our school) as one of the top college prep schools in (our) metro area. We were the only Christian school to be recognized that way. Our ACT scores consistently remain in the top percentile and we believe our education is one that is truly representative of a top private school, but is distinctive in that we offer transformational, distinctive, and authentic Christian education.”

When asked to showcase why her school was special one southern based school marketer responded, “(Our) Christian School is the largest Christian school in (the) area. Our tuition rates are very comparable with other Christian facilities in the area. The student body is large enough that students don’t feel isolated and yet remains small enough to have a family feel. (Our school) is fully accredited by ACSI and (the state’s accreditation association).” She continued, “Our athletic programs have seen success in the past years with two girls’ soccer state titles in the past two years and a boy’s cross-country state championship in 2004. Our students have consistently tested above state and national averages on SAT and ACT tests as well as on standardized testing. (Our)

graduates have been accepted at many universities across the nation including NYU, US Air Force Academy, US Naval Academy, Auburn University, and Emory University. Students are also involved in mission trips throughout the school year. Local missions are provided for middle school students and mission trips to Costa Rica and Honduras are available for the high school students.”

An eastern state Christian academy leader explained what differentiated his school was, “Bible based educational curriculum. All teachers are committed Christians, degreed, professionally licensed, and teaching in their area of major studies. The school just moved into new facilities with full media technology availability. There is a full athletic program that includes football and an award winning fine arts program. A partnership with (an affiliated university) allows students to take courses for dual credit.”

One participant from a New England based school worked in marketing for a computer company prior to joining her school. She stated, “My personal perspective is that schools need to market themselves to several constituencies: parents, staff, students, communities, local churches, volunteers, local businesses, alumni, and etc.” She said when asked how her school was differentiated, “Our facilities are the first draw. Our creativity and commitment to stimulating a great learning environment – freedom and quality – is usually one of the things that grabs parents whose children have been stifled in another setting. Other parents comment on organization, commitment to quality in all things, a sense that the school is well run.”

An administrator from a central U.S. school proclaimed, “(Our) academy is a non-denominational, independent, Christian educational community committed to assisting families in building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. It is our goal to provide wisdom, knowledge, faith, revelation, love, humility, understanding and trust from the heart of God to the heart of each child. Not only does (our academy’s) education prepare a child for this life, it prepares him for eternity.”

A southern state academy offers worldwide travel to their students. The headmaster shared that his school has a spring break trip planned for Greece with a three-day stop in Paris. Other trips included the 12th grade visiting Buenos Aires, Argentina, the 6th grade going to Washington D.C., and the 7th grade touring Atlanta. This academy also has a very strong academic and athletic program. The school was reported to be very well rounded and independently operated.

Another southern-based U.S. Christian school administrator viewed her school to be different because, “All teachers and staff are born-again Christians and are faithful in their local churches. We are not connected with a local church. The school is inter-denominational. Large families are charged a maximum of 2½ tuitions, a third enrolled child is only charged one-half of the regular tuition and any additional children can attend (our school) tuition free. The school also has a huge elementary youth football program that begins with a 5-6 year old team. There are full athletic and music programs for students. AP classes are offered in chemistry, English, calculus, U.S. history, and government. Grades 9–12 are accredited by (a state agency).”

One U.S. west coast school offers an outstanding fine arts program. Community leaders routinely seek them out for special performances. The school has been invited to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York and Crystal Cathedral in Southern California. Ninety-six percent of their graduates enroll in colleges. The school holds dual accreditation through ACSI and WASC. Parents have 24-hour a day access to their child’s grades, attendance, assignments, and school announcements.

Many schools identified that they are utilizing technology to enhance educational opportunities and support services. A respondent from an eastern U.S. Christian academy shared, “This is our first year to go to a wireless network. All of the teachers have their own laptops. The students are able to check out laptops throughout the day. Our website was recently updated and we are trying to put most processes on the web.”

A southern-based Christian academy respondent shared that her school also had a wireless network. This marketing director said, “Each high school student has their own laptop computer and we communicate regularly through E-mail, weekly, school newsletters, weekly teacher newsletters, and a quarterly student publication from the high school journalism class.”

Technology is also a definite strength at a New England based Christian school. This administrator shared, “We are using the Veracross system which integrates all data into one core informational reservoir. Teachers have been trained to put their grades on the Internet, to input assignments, and to use email with parents and staff. We have an outstanding technology coordinator who does a fabulous job. We have saved ourselves many hours of work by becoming much more technologically advanced and user friendly.”

Of the other responses, the most common answers given when asked how their school’s products/services differentiated from others included a strong emphasis on Christian values, excellent academic programs, strong college prep programs, Biblical integration, small class sizes, great students, safe environments, and caring professional staffs. Many of these same characteristics are identified within the article located in Appendix C. It was distributed by The National Association of Independent Schools.

Price Area

Schools were asked to provide an average school year tuition rate for a full-time student. Prices varied widely in the U.S. and a tuition range of \$15,835 was discovered. The Canadian school tuition range was only \$4,184. Due to currency differences, Canadian and American school data is separated to allow for more accurate reporting of the tuition findings. Table 4.6 displays the school average tuition data by national currency on the following page..

Table 4.6 School Tuition Data

Currencies	Canada	U.S.
Mean	\$3,547.93	\$4,504.63
Median	\$3,500.00	\$4,300.00
Minimum	\$1,300	\$1,000
Maximum	\$5,484	\$16,835
Range	\$4,184	\$15,835

It should be noted that in some cases Canadian Provinces maintain working relationships with Christian schools or societies. This approach is primarily being utilized in the western provinces. It is thought to allow for greater school choice opportunities, better facility utilization, and lower tuitions. Not all Canadian Christian schools are involved with their provincial departments of education, even in areas where such programs are available. The tuition information regarding Canadian Christian schools provided above does not identify any school/provincial working relationships, but simply reflects the amounts that schools are currently charging for enrollment tuition purposes.

When asked how their school's tuition rate was established, participants provided a wide variety of answers. The most common answers given were that tuitions reflected the local economies, and priced competitively with other private/Christian schools. Many cited that they really were not sure. Some stated that this was an area handled by someone else. One participant simply stated that a professional formula was established for the tuition earlier and since then yearly increases have been instituted. Another said, "I wish I knew – sounded good to somebody. It gradually increased in small increments. We are just now calculating the actual per pupil cost." This question turned out to be one of the hardest for respondents to answer.

Some participants knew exactly how their school's tuition policies were established. When a mid-Atlantic study participant was asked about her school's tuition rate, she said, "The administration and the school board did research of area schools and then determined the tuition rate." A Gulf-coast based study participant said the school board

and school administration established his school's tuition. It was based upon salary needs and services provided.

The school board of a New England academy based their school's tuition on being competitive and attractive. A western state school makes every effort to keep their tuition low. The administrator stated, "It is our desire to bring in students that otherwise would not be able to attend due to high tuitions."

One participant shared of his school's tuition, "The finance committee of the board of trustees prepared a budget, based on projected enrollment, and recommended the tuition rate to the board. The underlying principle used was that all operational costs need to be covered by the tuition revenues." He also said, "Parent participation is required as it not only helps keep tuition low, but also affords many opportunities for parents to be involved in the children's education."

One respondent shared that her school relies on setting their tuition appropriately. She explained about the tuition at her school, "We are comparable to other schools with similar programs and facilities. At the time of our new construction, we determined the tuition that was needed per child based on estimated enrollment. We have continued to introduce tuition increases when expenses have increased. We do not rely on fundraising." A marketing director at a central U.S. school shared that her school's leadership has utilized prayer and an annual budget to establish the tuition. The academy is able to raise five percent of its revenue through fundraising and ninety-five percent through tuition income.

Place Area

Before the fall of Jericho an event took place just outside of town, this event is described in Joshua 5:15 (Bible Gateway, 2005), the Scripture states, "The commander of the Lord's army replied, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did so." The Bible, in Exodus 3:5, also tells of a case where Moses stood on holy ground.

This Is the Place Monument in Utah marks the spot where the Mormon Pioneers first entered the Salt Lake Valley. It also marks the end of the 1,300-mile Mormon trail. At this point Brigham Young stopped his carriage in July 1847 and, after surveying the desert valley near the shores of the Great Salt Lake, declared, "This is the right place."

Although the above events are historical in nature, Christian schools often market their facilities as being the right place for education or as being special. Interviewees were asked if visitors were impressed with

the physical facilities at their school, whether the campus was visually appealing, clean, and in good repair.

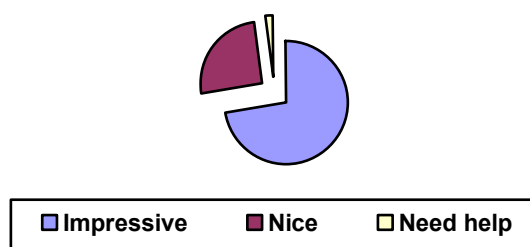
Seventy-three schools were rated as being very nice or outstanding. Twenty-six

participants rated their schools as being partially or somewhat compliant to the above statement and two schools were rated as needing some serious attention and repair.

A home page on one west coast school’s website scrolls through an assortment of school photographs. The pictures help to solidify the school’s prestigious image. The marketing director of this school revealed, “We are blessed with wonderful facilities and a beautiful campus that really sells itself.” One school located within the Appalachian Mountains was described as an old school with a new campus. Another school was similarly described as a 38-year-old school in a completely new campus.

One study participant shared that his mid-west school is housed in a former public school building on ten acres of green space. A different contributor shared that his school is located on a twenty-five acre site. There are nine buildings on campus that have been overhauled and converted from army barracks. One central state Christian academy has had three new additions added to the school over the past fifteen years. Remodeling and facility updating takes place annually. Their facility has been the recipient of three city beautification awards over the past fifteen years.

Fig 4.4 School Grounds

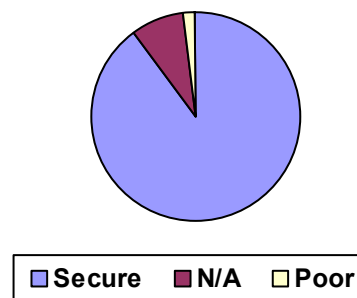


One participant shared that his academy recently relocated their operations from the southwest U.S. to the upper mid-west. This school leader explained that his school is located, in essence, in all fifty states and in thirty-two countries as they provide and serve families with mastery based distance-learning programs. A highly interactive educational computer program is utilized to provide students with individualized instruction, projects, and educational games. The curriculum is enhanced with many web-links to provide the most current, topic rich information in the various fields of study. The academy incorporates a Virtual Campus on their website to promote various activities, clubs, announcements, chat opportunities, and links. This program helps to foster a sense of community and involvement.

Study participants were asked if they felt the physical layout of their schools made it easy for people to find their way around campus, park their cars, and locate rooms. Seventy percent of the respondents agreed that their schools were designed very well. Twenty-seven percent felt that their schools partially complied, or were designed somewhat adequately. The remaining three percent chose either not to answer the question or felt their current facilities were poorly designed. A large proportion of the schools either, shared a church's facilities or rented space from churches. An actual count was not made possible from this study. Many schools shared that they were planning, building, or have recently relocated into new facilities.

Due to the elevated level of concern for safety, a question was posed to participants on whether they felt their school provided a safe campus environment. Ninety percent of the schools were rated as being safe and secure. Eight participants chose not to answer this question. One stated it was a matter of security not to answer the question. Only two schools

Fig 4.5 Campus Safety



were self-rated as providing poor security measures.

A study participant from a Canadian based school shared that one of her schools was being relocated to a safer area, in part due to security concerns within the current local community. Another participant shared, “Since 9/11 and the sniper incident in the Washington D.C. area, security has been tightened at the school.” The local police worked closely with one school to design and maintain an emergency safety plan for the school. Tabletop exercises were conducted in which the police and the administrative team discussed possible emergency scenarios. Professional safety inspectors highly recommend that every school should have a regularly reviewed emergency plan. Local professional responders can be contacted in order to assist in specifically designing a plan for each school.

One participant stated that it was part of his school’s mission statement to provide a secure environment. He said, “Regular checks are done on facilities and safety issues are dealt with as soon as possible. We have well developed discipline and harassment prevention policies. Staff work hard at developing a sense of community and students are helped to feel secure in asking questions and taking risks.” Most administrators understand that security threats can come from inside and out as well.

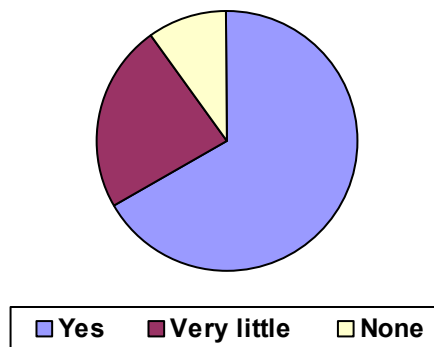
Promotion Area

The promotional area of marketing encompasses the combination of advertising, personal selling, publicity, and all other venues used to communicate with customers and prospects. Promotion is designed to create interest and awareness in a product, service, or event. Truth in all activities should be a given when it comes to Christian schools, but a Canadian school administrator pointed out, “We have seen competitors blanket the newspapers, school fairs, educational magazines, and etc. with all sorts of elaborate misrepresentations of what they deliver.”

Sometimes the promotional area of school marketing can be controversial and it can be quite costly. A question on the School Marketing Questionnaire asked study

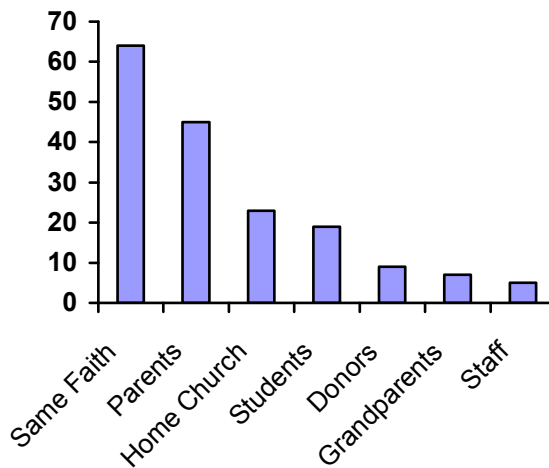
contributors if their schools advertised. A majority of sixty-seven, or 66.3% of the schools said yes, twenty-four schools, or 23.8% answered that their schools did very little advertising, and ten schools, said that they did not use advertising efforts at all. For the purposes of this study, advertising is viewed as a promotional effort that requires payment to a media entity. The data that supports research questions four and five will expound on which types of ads worked best for the schools and identify advertising efforts that have faltered.

Fig 4.6 Schools that Advertise



An anonymous contributor suggested, “It’s critical to clearly establish who you are trying to attract before spending one cent on advertising. All of your efforts should be measured for success. Otherwise you may be blindly casting your cash into the void.” Chosen markets must be of sufficient size and be viable enough to sustain and support a school’s operations. The questionnaire was designed to address this issue by asking the participants to identify what groups of people were viewed as their school’s current customers, stakeholders, and prospects.

Fig. 4.7 Customers / Prospects



Out of the 101 Christian schools involved in this study, 64 listed that people of the same faith had been reached the most and that this group continued to be targeted the most in promotional efforts designed for recruitment purposes. This question was presented in an open-ended format. Groups were not identified in

advance. Four study participants identified five of the different groups shown in graph 4.7 as their school’s customers and targeted prospects.

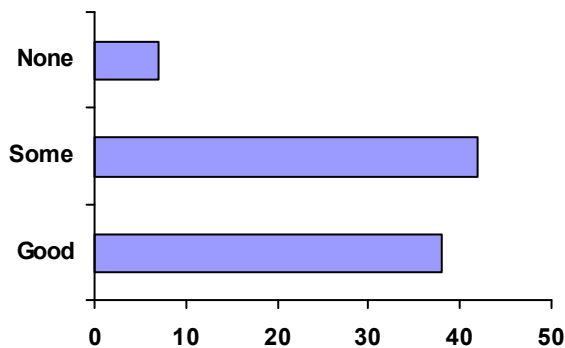
A western-based participant shared that her school has identified and targeted parents who want more for their children than what the public school system has to offer as their customer and prospect groups. Another Christian academy views their customers as the parents in the lower grades and then considers the students to become customers once they reach middle and high school. Feedback showed that many schools attempted to target parents who attending local area churches. Some schools have tried to use current school parents who attend these churches to market the school. One study participant mentioned utilizing staff input and feedback to collect customer information. They use many types of surveys and provide Biblical customer service training. A school located in the southwest U.S. has identified their customers as mostly middle class to lower income households. The families are Evangelical Christians from all denominations. They are parents who do not want their children in public schools.

A component within the promotional area of marketing that usually has little to no cost involves public relations activities. The earliest form of public relations and still the most widely practiced is publicity. The principal instrument of publicity is the press release, which provides the mass media with the raw material and background for a news story. The school administrators and

staff were asked if their schools had been able to establish any ties with the local media for public relations or publicity opportunities, only 38% answered that they had been able to attain good media relations. Forty-two schools stated that they would

receive sporadic media coverage and seven schools said that they have never received

Fig 4.8 PR Exposure in Local Media



any media publicity. Fourteen schools did not directly give an answer about their public relations efforts. Information that is more detailed will be presented later in the supporting data for question four.

Partnering Area

Partnering is one of the four new marketing characteristics introduced in the OCTOPUS plan. This area focuses on the ability of a school to reach out and establish mutually beneficial and rewarding arrangements with like-minded people, businesses, or organizations. For the school, these partnerships may lead to better school services, promotional opportunities, additional revenues, or lower expenses. The school partner should also reap rewards through the experience. By striving to create win-win situations with partners, successful programs can be nurtured and renewed indefinitely.

Christian school marketing colleagues were asked if their schools had established any cooperative partnerships with local businesses, churches, or community groups through sponsorships, contests, cooperative advertising, signage, revenue opportunities, or other support. Twenty-five felt that their school had achieved strong partnerships; fifty-seven colleagues said that they had achieved some partnering efforts, and sixteen stated that their schools had not established any partnerships. Three schools chose not to answer the question.

External Partnerships. A Canadian colleague and study participant shared, “We have a business incentive program, through which local businesses donate back to the school a percentage of what we spend at their store. Such spending is tracked by us signing a ledger every time we do business at participating locations. Participating businesses send us a cheque every month.”

A Great Lakes area school has a very strong partnering program. School families are encouraged to register for guest cards at a local partnering grocery store. This card would then be scanned at the register during a regular food purchase. Throughout the 2004-05 school year, this program contributed over \$5,000 to the school. Another program that

helped to provide income for the school was through www.schoolpop.com. After registering, one can shop and earn money for their school from hundreds of name brand merchant websites. Schoolpop offers special deals and they contribute up to 18% with every purchase. Other notable partnering programs included; Target stores, a recycled inkjet cartridge project, Campbell's Soup, and the General Mills, Box Tops for Education program that helped raise \$1,300 from last year's campaign. Each collected box top was worth 10-15 cents. A partnership with a very large state university allowed additional funds to be raised through an arrangement to operate a concession stand.

One study contributor shared that his school has formulated a sponsorship agreement with a Barnes and Nobles Bookstore in which the school newspaper receives a percentage of sales over a designated weekend. Albertson's grocery store sponsors a program that gives the band a percentage of sales. C C's Coffee also gives a percentage of sales to the school.

A southern U.S. academy sponsors a contemporary Christian concert each year for the community that has featured such people as Nicole C. Mullen, FFH, Avalon, New Song, and Big Daddy Weave. In order to attract such talent and promote the event, sponsorships from local businesses have been established. The academy is also a member of its local Chamber of Commerce and they are actively involved with local charities.

Another marketing colleague shared that his academy has a strategic alliance with a large Christian bookstore. They also purchase billboards from a large area business that is friendly to their mission. A western Canadian study participant was able to establish a relationship with a new local Christian radio station that wanted to get their name known. A partnership was formed that allowed the school to run ads a reduced rate.

One mid-western based administrator stated that his school was able to showcase itself by being involved with and hosting such community events as Chamber of Commerce breakfasts. He also said, "We work with other Christian schools for office

pricing and have developed a general Christian School brochure that features approximately 12 schools within (our greater metropolitan area).”

A school located in the Rocky Mountain region has also been very successful in forming corporate and donor partnerships. The school was instrumental in forming a community task force to help Hurricane Katrina victims. The school system has also partnered with local businesses to help needy school families through a SCRIP program. This program is designed to encourage families to shop at participating vendors, refunds from family purchases are then applied towards a tuition reduction. The school also maintains a partnership with a local car dealership and a mortgage company.

One central U.S. school has been able to establish a partnership with IBM and the church that oversees the school. This school marketing leader also stated, “The academy has been able to use pastoral lunches as a wonderful tool in building partnerships with local churches.”

A western school marketing leader shared, “We are constantly building relationships with local businesses, churches, and etc. to keep them aware of our presence and our progress. Just yesterday a Wal-Mart representative stopped by to give us a \$500 grant and asked if they could be placed on our Foundation Mailing List to be able to keep current with what is happening at the school.”

A school marketer located in the intermountain west highlighted an outstanding partnership program between her Christian school and 25 local participating restaurants. She said that school families support the event very well and the whole community enjoys it. Her school has also partnered with Champion Golf Events to manage and promote their annual golf tournament and walkathon.

Internal Partnerships. Internal partnership opportunities are often the easiest to form, yet they are overlooked by many Christian schools. “The actual stakeholders in a school’s operations have the most to gain by its success,” stated the headmaster of a school located in New England. A question was posed to see if participants felt their

school staff was treated as integral partners in maintaining the school's successful operations and image. Participants were also asked if staff input and feedback was sought for marketing efforts. Of the results, 76.2% felt that their schools were doing an outstanding to very good job in utilizing a professional partnership with their staff. There were 24 individuals, or 23.8%, that felt their schools could do a better job in using their staff as integral partners. A few participants shared a concern that the staff should not be burdened with school marketing operations. Another group of study members held an opposite viewpoint. One respondent credited her school's marketing success to the actions and input of the staff.

Interviewees were also asked if they viewed their school's staff to be consistently courteous, professional, and caring towards the best interest and success of the school and its community. The majority of the responses, 85.1%, agreed that the staff at their schools met the above criteria. The rest of the responses rated the staff at their schools to be somewhat compliant to the questionnaire statement. One study participant shared, "We strive to meet the mark, but we do suffer from set-backs on occasion."

A number of other groups and individuals were mentioned in the schools partnering efforts. Parents were mentioned most frequently as partners and stakeholders. A southwestern-based U.S. Christian School has a system in place to communicate with the parents on a continuous basis and each year a survey is sent home to the parents. One headmaster stated, "Not only do we partner with our teachers, but we partner with parents in educating students. In fact, we clearly state that it is the parents' responsibility to educate their children. We partner with the parents to provide expertise in areas where they may fall short."

Grandparents were also noted as partners as a number of schools observed a much stronger involvement. Some schools have noticed grandparents taking a more active role in providing financial support, driving children to and from school, and even serving as guardians of their grandchildren in some cases.

A few schools even mentioned their students as partners. A southern U.S. school shared that they were trying a new program that encouraged students to invite their Christian friends to visit the school. This program stipulates that after a new student passes a probationary period the referring student be entitled to a \$100 referral reward. More thorough referral program information is available in the data, which supports question four.

Local churches and pastors were mentioned often as potential partners. Parent churches were also cited as partners by many of the participating schools. Local community groups and charities were also mentioned as partners. One school shared that it was able to find willing partners by inviting professional speakers and hosting meals for realtors, pastors, donors, and other guests. This participant shared, “By sharing our facility and spreading God’s Word, other people of like-mind naturally wanted to become involved and powerful partnerships were formed.”

Processes Area

The OCTOPUS plan views this area as a school’s internal tasks. They shape and brand the culture of a school community and are often referred to as school policies. Outcome derived school processes and policies such as discipline or conduct codes, dress codes, class scheduling, enrollment procedures, and a number of other such written or understood operational school procedures all fit within this category. This focus area affects students, teachers, and staff most directly as these items deal with day-to-day internal operations. Parents rely on feedback from their children and communication provided from the schools to remain informed about events taking place in this area.

When asked to rate if the materials associated with their schools were visually appealing and professional in manner on items such as notices, report cards or statements, 73.3% said that their schools should be rated very high for their efforts. One interviewee mentioned, “We have definitely improved in this area within the last year. We hired Crane MetaMarketing to help us with branding work and they created multiple pieces for

the school. We now have a new nameplate and tagline, consistent colors, and look to apply these to all of our materials.”

Additional feedback gathered from the questionnaire revealed that 70.3% of the study participants felt that their schools were utilizing technologies such as the Internet to provide services, communications, and information. A number of different software programs were favorably mentioned by the participants. These programs designed by Alpha Omega Software, Blackbaud, Edline, Grade Quick, Rediker, School Minder, and Veracross are used to assist the schools with their daily operations, record keeping, and communication efforts. Email programs were also used extensively along with school Web pages.

An east coast administrator shared that his academy’s motto is, “Excellence in motion.” This school is currently in the process of improving their materials by utilizing a program from Rediker software. The new computer program provides an easy to maintain record program for attendance, discipline, and grades. Student demographic information could also be tracked and report cards, transcripts, and reports can be professionally designed and printed. Other processes and policies of the school include a student code that is listed in the school handbook, there are daily chapel services, and an enforced school uniform code.

A Canadian administrator pointed out many different processes that helped to differentiate his school. He said, “What really sets (us) apart I believe from other schools is our commitment to the Truth in all areas of who we are. Having said this, part of this commitment to God’s Truth is being humble enough to allow Him to show us in what ways we are falling short of glorifying Him. This commitment requires us to demonstrate our dependence on Him in everything from the admission process for parents, hiring of staff, discipline process of children, teaching all our subject matter from a Biblical worldview, athletic and fine arts programs, and even how we represent Christ in our Christmas and year-end programs.”

A southern-based U.S. participant shared, “We pray for wisdom and guidance daily. As a Christian school, we are well aware that all our customers and stakeholders are God’s children. This school is accountable to the King of kings. Therefore, every activity, process, and school policy is regularly evaluated for its effectiveness and conveyed message. In areas where we fall short – and there are many – we seek feedback from our staff, parent, and students so we can be constantly improving. Our funds at times are limited, but our imaginations and problem solving skills should always be evident and abundant.”

It has been said that anybody can talk the talk of a Christian, but a good Christian school has students that walk the walk of a Christian as well. Study members were asked if the students at their school had been notified that their behavior is reflective on the school and they need to serve as ambassadors at all times. Over 87% of the schools agreed that they were doing a very good job in this area and an additional 9.9% of the schools felt somewhat or partially successful in informing their students of being ambassadors.

A northern plains Christian school speaks of student ambassadorship often. The interviewee from this school said, “We remind students that even when they are not participating in a school function they are representing the school because people know where they attend.” Another participant shared that her school often receives wonderful comments about the behavior of their students when visiting other places. Some schools require their students to sign a covenant regarding their behavior in and outside of school. One study participant shared that his Christian school puts a great deal of emphasis on student ambassadorship. He felt that the students at his school were challenged to be stretcher-bearers, as shown in the second chapter of the book of Mark. Another interviewee stated that a 24/7 witness was primary to the mission of their school. An east coast U.S. Christian academy has a student handbook that outlines the Biblical principles behind the student expectations. All students at this academy must sign an agreement

promising to support the standards of the school twenty-four hours a day. A different administrator felt that his students have also been notified of their ambassador roles. He stated, “At the same time, we emphasize that our behavior expectations are not because they are students at a Christian school. They are accountable for their behavior before God.”

In order to find out what processes were used to attract and please students, a question was posed that asked what marketing efforts are used to instill school pride in the students. Three schools stated that they used large student picture displays in prominent areas of their schools. The pictures were changed frequently and students really enjoyed seeing their exposures and their friends. One Canadian Society for Education member explained how her schools’ sports teams go to provincial championship events often and they compete against some big city schools. Many schools offer recognition of student performance through assemblies, awards recognition programs, scholarships, articles placed in local papers, and notes to parents and students. A mid-western administrator shared, “Although this effort wasn’t meant to be marketing, the school implemented school uniforms three years ago. This has, to a large effect, increased school pride because the students walk around all day with the (our) logo on their shirts. They then leave school and go places with (our school’s) logo on their shirt.”

One study participant shared, “We constantly state our expectations for our students and student-athletes, since they are representing themselves, their families, their school, and their Lord when interacting with each other and others in the communities of (our) greater (school metropolitan area).” It was also reported that this school highly values the input of its parents and students. Their input is regularly sought through school communications, board meetings, and focus groups. This school’s administrator also said, “If a current or prospective family has a poor impression of our services, they will not only fail to tell others about our excellent school, but they will also spread negative

marketing about (us). We can't afford to lose a single family, if the choices are within our realm of influence."

One study participant contributed, "Our school is dedicated to educating our students from a Biblical perspective. Jesus taught utilizing relationships with a servant's heart, we try to do the same. We understand students will have a desire to learn when they feel they are genuinely cared for and respected, relationships develop that type of environment. We also teach our students about service and give them opportunities to experience service first hand."

A western marketing colleague claimed, "The school has an excellent reputation and is making exciting progress as we work to finish our facility in the next few years. There is a healthy atmosphere around the school and a spirit of unity among staff and students. As with all schools our largest room is the room for improvement." To instill pride in the students it was explained, "We have a school store that is operated by the students. It is packed with school pride products and clothing. Students are encouraged to show healthy school pride at various sporting events and other gatherings. We also have a booth at the local fair and we participate in the July 4th parade to keep community exposure and school pride pumping."

An interviewee from a New England based U.S. school explained that her school had just designed a new professional logo that would better represent the students and the overall mission. The school's old logo led to some confusion. A new sports program is also under development for the students along with new clothing and promotional items.

A marketing specialist at a school based in the central U.S. was kind enough to send numerous promotional items that displayed her school's logo. The academy's logo was prominently emblazoned onto business card sized calculators, pens, unique three color highlighters, pencils, and folders. The gear from this academy is now displayed with pride in this researcher's office. The green, gold, and crimson logo is attractive, unique, and rich in appearance. The logo helps to portray a high quality, professional image for

the academy. The school's high quality forms and numerous publications help to reinforce and build on this image.

Other colleagues in this study mentioned that their school had a professionally designed school logo in 52.5% of the surveys or interviews. School logos were not mentioned by 37 of the 101 participating schools and 10.9% of the schools stated that their logo was not professionally developed. It was pointed out by one colleague that even though his school's logo was developed in-house, he felt that it was very professional and that it fully exemplified the school's character. Another school respondent added, "Our school logo is professionally designed, very attractive, and easily identifiable. It has been a very helpful tool in our marketing efforts." A person who wished to remain anonymous shared, "Our logo would never win a contest, but our drive to achieve excellence in the processes of teaching, learning, athletics and administration have helped to bring respect to our school and all of its associated symbols."

Possibilities Area

This area involves analyzing a school's current positioning posture and encourages forward, strategic thinking and planning. The OCTOPUS plan views this component as critical in achieving positive changes and growth. Through honest evaluation, a clear picture can be drawn of how a school is currently conducting its operations. From a position based on a strong sense of self-awareness, school leaders can more easily identify marketing possibilities and challenges.

A northeastern U.S. administrator expressed, "There is much collaboration on our staff. We review every major activity or event and discuss strengths and needed improvements." A colleague from a Canadian based school shared, "We should involve our teachers more in marketing and we could improve our school materials." A participant from a school in the Washington D.C. area enthusiastically stated, "Our vision is really unique for the future of the school." She also shared, "We hope to grow to 1,100 students at our new property and open schools in other countries. We would like for our

school to be a place where conferences can be held as well as outreaches. There are many more details and it is a very exciting time in our school's history."

One interviewee said, "(Our school) seeks steady, measurable improvement. This is a school committed to improving itself in every area, including facilities, educational values, and academics." Another interviewee offered, "I'd love to form a Christ-centered community college on our campus and offer dual credit to high school students."

Some schools are already operating at full capacity levels so six participants shared that their marketing efforts weren't geared towards growth, but instead focused on providing service excellence and plans designed to maintain their current student base. One study member shared, "If we don't keep our facilities clean, our academics exemplary, and our customer's needs met – then our customers won't be ours anymore." As mentioned throughout this report, many Christian schools have just recently relocated to new campuses or they were in the process of building new ones.

A SWOT analysis is a popular strategic planning tool used to help identify possibilities. This tool was designed for auditing an organization and its environment. It can be used as the first stage of planning by helping marketers to focus on key issues. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are based on internal operational factors of a school. Opportunities and threats are the external factors such as competitor actions, legal challenges or changes, or a number of other activities. A number of study participants mentioned this tool by its name. For those that prefer to look at the negative aspects first, a TWOS analyses can be utilized. This plan encourages participants to identify threats and weaknesses prior to listing opportunities and strengths.

Evaluation and testing of students occurs regularly within classrooms. Amazingly, it is often the case that a thorough review of a school's overall operations does not take place. Throughout the research process of this study there were a number of colleagues that admitted their school's marketing efforts were often not monitored or reviewed for

effectiveness. When a student fails in a class, they must repeat their course. If a school fails in one of their marketing efforts they should not repeat, but avoid unsuccessful courses of action. By utilizing measurement techniques in all school area operations, successes and failures can be identified along with an array of possibilities.

Pleasing God Area

This eighth and final OCTOPUS plan marketing component was saved for last, but it should be first and foremost in all the operations of a Christian school according to a western based school leader. She stated, “Christ must remain at the center of everything. Quite often, Christian schools begin veering toward the secular world with their programs and philosophies in educating children. It is vital that Christ is in there in the forefront.” This administrator also shared, “The staff and administration (at our school) strive to keep Christ the center of all that takes place. With Christ in the center, everything around Him will excel.”

An administrator from the Pacific Northwest very directly proclaimed, “Christian schools and all the people involved in the process must walk with God.” A school located in a neighboring state also strives to please God with their operations. This study participant explained, “(Our school) puts God first in all it does. We seek to provide a high quality, well-rounded education and strive for excellence to God’s glory in all we do. We offer a variety of programs and activities, with the goal of reaching the hearts of children for Jesus Christ.”

The mission statement at one participating school is, “Assisting parents in the education of their children in the light of God’s Word.” Another interviewee shared about her school, “We strive to honor God in all we do and say. We incorporate God’s Word into every aspect of our teaching and our lives.” One respondent said about her school staff, “We annually strive to show forth a Christ-like attitude in everything.”

An anonymous participant from the Southern U.S. expounded, “We know that God Himself created us from dust. Every breath we take and every heartbeat we are given is a

gift from Him. This understanding helps us realize that we are dependent on Him and not the other way around. It is an honor and a privilege to serve Him through the process of education. Sure, we strive to achieve high-test scores so our students will receive scholarships and our school gains accolades, but our main effort is to please and serve our Master and Creator. We seek to lay up our treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. Our school prepares our students to succeed mightily here on earth and hereafter in eternity. All of the glory from our story belongs to God. We are nothing without Him.”

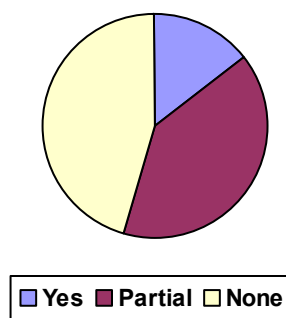
Written Marketing Plans

“A marketing plan is a marketing weapon that costs nary a cent, guides all your efforts down the most propitious path, and yet is absent from the arsenals of most businesses,” according to Levinson (1990, p. 38). He feels, “A good marketing plan intimidates no one, except perhaps the competition. It serves as a written map of the route-showing the goal and how to attain it.” McMurtry (2003, p. 247) proclaims, “The purpose of writing a plan is to define strategies, priorities, commitments, and activities in a way that serves as a guide for all marketing efforts. A marketing plan commits you and your organization to a specific direction and guides your allocation of resources.” An old saying comes to mind which states, “By failing to plan, one plans to fail.”

The second research component for this study was designed to find if Christian schools operated within the framework of a written marketing plan.

Interviews and survey responses led to the conclusion that only 15 of the 101 participating schools had a written marketing plan in place that was reviewed by the staff and referred to for policy decisions. Forty participants stated that their schools had partially

Fig 4.9 Written Marketing Plan



complied with some sort of marketing effort and 46 Christian schools were found to have no written marketing plan.

Marketing Plan Developers

When a New England school administrator was asked who developed the marketing plan at her school, she shared that “The plan” resided in her as the administrator of the school and as one who worked in a marketing capacity prior to arriving at the school. She stated, “Marketing is simply part of who I am and what I do. The danger in this is that a marketing plan/strategy has not been formally developed. If the next administrator doesn’t have a marketing background, the school will be at a disadvantage.”

A Gulf coast school admitted that it had a limited plan in the past. It was shared that a long-range planning committee currently was involved in developing a better plan. A New England based school’s staff was identified as having quite a bit of decision-making power. It was given opportunities to speak about any aspect of the school at any time. At an east coast Canadian academy, marketing efforts are not shared with the staff. Marketing there is viewed as more of a function for the principal and board of governors.

One administrator shared that his school has not developed a written marketing plan yet, but is working towards one. In order to fulfill a class assignment last spring, some students from a nearby university helped to develop a comprehensive advertising campaign for the school. This same administrator said, “A parent on our development committee has expertise in marketing which should prove critical to the development and implementation of a full blown marketing plan.”

An administrator from one of this studies largest participating academies stated, “Marketing strategies are developed primarily on a corporate level, with input from our administration.” He also mentioned, “While there are no formal procedures in place to solicit the entire staff’s involvement in marketing efforts, all are aware of the need to be positive advocates, both in their communications and daily support roles with students and parents. Academy administration has an open-door policy. All ideas or suggestions

for improvement and growth are welcome. Periodically, some staff members are involved in writing or editing marketing copy.”

This third research question was designed to uncover who was responsible for developing the Christian schools marketing plans. Sixty-one schools did not provide any information for this question. Table 4.7 displays the people and groups that were named within the 40 responses to this question. More than one person or groups were identified in some cases.

Table 4.7 Designers of school marketing plans (occurrences)

Administration (24)	Development Committee (1)
Board of Directors (14)	Admissions Team (1)
Development Director (6)	Communications Director (1)
Superintendent (4)	Parents (1)
Marketing Committee (2)	Faculty (1)

When asked if their schools were employing marketing or public relations professionals, respondents provided the following results in table 4.8

Table 4.8 Does your school employ marketing or public relations professionals?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	28	27.7
No	72	71.3

Participants were also asked to share if the services of any outside firms or consultants were used to develop any of their school’s marketing strategies. Those results are displayed in table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Has your school contracted with outside firms for marketing purposes?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	35	34.7
No	62	61.4

Of the thirty-five schools that mentioned using the services of an outside firm, twenty-seven found the experience to be beneficial, five felt the outside services were not

helpful, and three respondents were either neutral in their evaluations or chose not to answer.

A Canadian school respondent disclosed that an outside firm managed her school's Christmas auction and golf tournament. She also said, "The services were beneficial. However, we are yet to experience the types of success these professionals say is possible in other places." A study participant from a school in central Canada explained, "We had a company come and do a study on what we could do. Some of the information was beneficial." A Rocky Mountain based U.S. school found the services of the Timothy Group to be helpful. An eastern U.S. Christian academy cited that the services of Crane Meta-Marketing were very beneficial. A western school announced that it was pleased with the services of Champion Golf Events. The Goehner Group was consulted to help plan a growth strategy for a Pacific coast U.S. school. The current administration and board felt the results were helpful. An east coast academy discovered outside services to be essential when they were conducting a capital campaign. An administrator from the Great lakes region commented, "We were developing a strategy to re-market the school to families who had left for different reasons. The firm was beneficial in that our goals to re-attract people were achieved."

A respondent from the eastern U.S. shared, "About three years ago we did have an outside person come in to do an evaluation and to discuss long-range plans. Some of the ideas and proposals have been adopted. Overall, the administration and school board felt the school was not in a position to actively pursue some of the suggestions." A colleague from the mid-west U.S. remarked, "We used a group to raise funds through a golf outing, it was semi-successful, not as high as hoped for." A respondent from the Great Plains of the U.S. shared, "Yes, the services were beneficial, but the impact was limited due to the fact that no one is specifically employed by the school to carry out those strategies."

A western Canadian school respondent rendered, "We recently employed a market research firm to conduct a survey of our existing community to determine perceptions

and level of satisfaction. Working through the results is still in progress but it was a worthwhile process.” A central U.S. academy utilized an outside firm to develop their school’s logo, crest, and billboard.

An east coast respondent said that the services rendered by an outside marketing firm were beneficial, but were quite costly. Outside marketing services provided to one Great Lakes based school were seen as not being helpful at all. The administrator explained, “The services were extremely expensive and did not produce measurable results.” A respondent from a southern U.S. Christian school shared, “We have learned the hard way to make sure our service contracts are now in writing. We have had good experiences with consultants and also poor ones. By having a clearly defined contract in writing, grievances can be avoided and everyone knows what is expected. We don’t always get what we pay for, but we have found our new contract policy to be a very helpful tool in achieving our goals.”

Successful Marketing Strategies

Can successful marketing operations of Christian schools be identified? This fourth research question is supported by numerous interview questions that primarily deal within the promotional and process areas of the OCTOPUS plan. It is desirable that any positive examples may be adapted, adopted, and utilized by other Christian schools in order to strengthen their own unique marketing efforts.

Hugh Burkitt, chief executive of the Marketing Society, says, "Good marketing is always about both identifying and providing what customers want and then communicating those benefits effectively. Competition is usually the key stimulus to better marketing." McDonald and Keegan (2002, p. 7) believe, “The role of marketing is to ensure (1) that the company focuses on the total environments of the business, markets, competition, customers, government, and trends; and (2) that it uses all knowledge and experience to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with its customers.”

Mike Connor (2004, p. 2), Lead Consultant and Principal of Connor Associates, says, “Good marketing begins within an organization and relies on collaboration.” He believes, “Everyone in the school should be held responsible for advancing the mission. Everyone markets, everyone recruits, everyone fundraises and everyone at the school is a teacher.” He also said, “Great marketing, like effective learning, occurs when there is a structure and expectation for collaboration and cross-fertilization.”

Good marketing in the business world is usually measured in financial terms and profit and loss statements. Christian schools are usually not measured in the same manner, but they must remain financially viable in order to maintain their operations and continue their mission. A question was posed to participants in order to determine if their school was able to maintain break-even or profitable operations. Encouragingly, 79 interviewees answered that their school operations were at least break-even. Nineteen answered that the schools were operating within a budget deficit and three schools chose not to respond to this fiscal related question.

One administrator pointed out that non-profit entity should use the term net-equity rather than profitability when describing financial results. His school was not only in a net-equity position it was also operating with nearly a 100% student enrollment and waiting lists in most grades. This southern U.S. based Christian school advertises very little and did not formally have any established ties with the local media for PR. The administrator suggests, “Be successful with the ones you have. In other words, if a school provides a truly superior program that offers the best value in the market, demand will be high. Excellence must be more than a motto, it must be real, pervasive, and at a world-class level.”

When school enrollments are cross-tabulated with advertising and media relations data, it can be observed that all 31 of the schools with more than 500 students have at least some sort of advertising effort or a relationship with the media for local coverage of their programs. Twenty-three of the thirty-one largest schools maintain some sort of

presence in both PR and advertising. It should be noted that actual dollar amounts spent on advertising were not collected from study participants. Feedback involving advertising and media relations were provided at full discretion of the interviewees. The complete results of this cross-tabulation are displayed on the following page in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 - Advertise * Media Relations * Enrollment Cross-tabulation

Enrollment	Advertising	Media Relations			N/A
		Good	Minimal	None	
< 200	Yes	18	8		2
	Little	3	3	1	
	No		2		
200 - 499	Yes	4	8	3	5
	Little	1	5	1	2
	No		1		2
> 500	Yes	5	10	2	2
	Little	5	3		
	No	2	2		

FEP, full enrollment percentage, is an internal measurement that can also be used to help gauge the effectiveness of a school's marketing strategies. This measurement displays how close a school's enrollment is in relation to its capacity. The FEP number should be weighted according to a potential full capacity figure of a facility. A high FEP number if presented alone may provide a false impression of a booming school. For the purposes of this study, the FEP is only meant to represent facility utilization. A responder shared, "We don't advertise to recruit new students. We advertise on occasion to keep our current customers interested and to maintain our positive image within the Christian community. Our school is currently full and most grades have waiting lists." A number of other administrators and marketing professionals shared similar sentiments. Of the 32 Christian schools that reported having a FEP above 90%, at least 31 mentioned having some sort of media program or ongoing advertising efforts and the one remaining school may have qualified but complete information was not provided. Table 4.11 displays the collected FEP data in a cross tabulation format on the following page.

Table 4.11 - Advertising * Media Relations * FEP Cross-tabulation

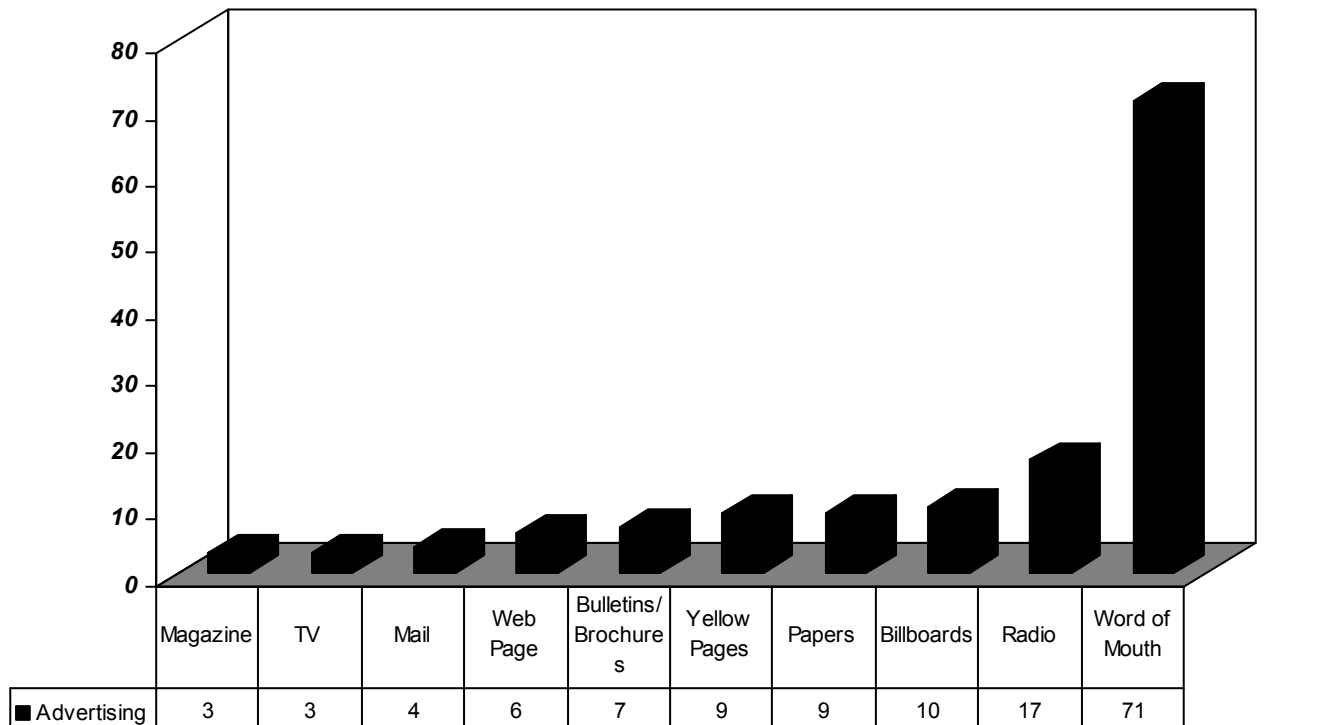
FEP - Full Enrollment Percentage	Advertising	Media Relations			
		Good	Minimal	None	N/A
90 – 100%	Yes	10	9		1
	Little	3	4		1
	None	1	2		1
70 – 89%	Yes	14	12	5	7
	Little	5	4	2	
	None		3		1
<70%	Yes	2	4		1
	Little	1	2		1
	None	1			

One study participant shared this viewpoint, “Marketing is an overall strategy to promote the mission of the school and its programs to the community. The heart of marketing our school is the integrity of aligning our mission, values, philosophy, policies, and program. Families who trust the school to deliver what is promised will naturally spread the word.” She also stated, “Marketing is accomplished in a variety of ways. Anytime a student or teacher goes into the community representing (us), they market the school. Their demeanor, attentiveness, manners, and community service builds the school’s reputation. On field trips, the students are required to wear a school shirt, in part to promote the school’s purpose. Teachers market the school by presenting at conferences, participating on accreditation teams and taking on other leadership roles in the community. Our printed materials market the school and church, its mission, values, philosophy, and programs. They are reviewed twice each year for accuracy and alignment. The website is updated often to reflect actual practices. Paid advertising is used less frequently as the school’s reputation develops.”

As mentioned earlier in the report, 90.1% of the study participants reported that their schools advertised to some extent. An open-ended question was posed to identify which advertising efforts were most successful for the school. The highest response by far was for word of mouth advertising with 71 mentions. The next best means of advertising was

found to be the radio; 17 respondents mentioned it. Other mentioned favorable ways to advertise are displayed in figure 4.10 on the next page.

Graph 4.10 – Advertisements that have worked best for schools



Word of mouth advertising, also known as buzz marketing, is defined by the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, WOMMA (2005) as, “The act of consumers providing information to other consumers.” It is also defined, “Giving people a reason to talk about your products and services, and making it easier for that conversation to take place.” Word of mouth advertising is the art and science of building active, mutually beneficial consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-marketer communications.

Creamer (2005, p. 32) stated, “Buzz marketing exists in a world of contradictions. It is both a new way of thinking and a tried-and-true business practice. It’s at the center of how messages spread, yet it doesn’t fit squarely into any one particular communications discipline.” According to WOMMA, “Word of mouth is a pre-existing phenomenon that marketers are only now learning how to harness, amplify, and improve. Word of mouth

marketing isn't about creating word of mouth - it's learning how to make it work within a marketing objective.” A number of study participants agree that word of mouth efforts can be encouraged and facilitated. Christian schools can work hard to make people happier, they can listen to consumers, they can make it easier for them to tell their friends, and they can make certain that influential individuals know about the good qualities of a product or service. Word of mouth marketing empowers people to share their experiences, it harnesses the voice of the customer for the good of the brand, and it is acknowledging that unsatisfied customers are equally powerful (WOMMA).

All word of mouth marketing techniques are based on the concepts of customer satisfaction, two-way dialog, and transparent communications according to WOMMA. The basic elements are: Educating people about your products and services; Identifying people most likely to share their opinions; Providing tools that make it easier to share information; Studying how, where, and when opinions are being shared; and listening and responding to supporters, detractors, and neutrals.

WOMMA (2005) states that word of mouth cannot be faked or invented. Attempting to fake word of mouth is unethical and creates a backlash, damages the brand, and tarnishes the corporate reputation. Legitimate word of mouth marketing acknowledges consumers' intelligence -- it never attempts to fool them. Ethical marketers reject all tactics related to manipulation, deception, infiltration, or dishonesty.

The Director of Marketing & Development for a Christian academy in the southeast feels that word of mouth exposure is always best. She advised, “Get the buzz out there that awesome things are happening at your school and keep the buzz going.” Her academy provides t-shirts and other items with the school's logo at reasonable prices and often at no cost to school students and families. The school is advertised on the radio, in local newspapers, phone books, and on the Internet. School bumper stickers are handed out and the school even sponsors a Contemporary Christian Concert for the community each year.

The director of marketing at an intermountain school stated, “Marketing is often viewed as an event rather than a process.” He encourages and challenges the staff to be marketers in the recruitment effort. He feels, “Customer service is crucial along with relationship building. We strive to keep current customers and to get people talking positively about our schools.” During his phone interview, he mentioned that some ads and events are so successful that a buzz continues to carry the created images and messages. As a case in point, he said that there are still people that talk about the Super Bowl ads that used frogs to pronounce the name of a popular American beer. He feels that after correctly identifying a target market, coordinated efforts can be utilized to create awareness and interest for Christian schools.

In explaining how marketing is applied at his school, this superintendent articulated, “Marketing is the face that we present. In essence, it is the presentation that we make to the community.” Another school leader explained that at his school, marketing is, “Saturating our local area with the awareness of what we offer in Christian education and why families would benefit from being involved. Our goal is TOMA – top of the mind awareness – so when people think of Christian schools their next thought is (our) Academy.”

A central U.S. based survey participant stated, “Since our mission statement and admissions policies stipulate that we are in partnership with the Christian home, our marketing is targeted for the Christian community. We advertise on Christian radio, in Christian printed publications, and through the local church. Most effective is the word of mouth advertising we receive from satisfied parents and students.”

A Mid-Atlantic States Christian academy leader shared, “Marketing is best accomplished by word of mouth. We get far more students from satisfied families than any other form of marketing. We do the traditional approaches of radio and TV spots throughout enrollment periods. Newspaper ads are used but have proven to provide the least result. Information packets are provided to interested families and include a DVD

showcasing the school programs and philosophy. During the school year, we use the media to report school activities and athletic results. The school yearbook provides a great review piece to recruit in-house families. The superintendent also publishes a periodic informational sheet to keep parents apprised of the good things happening on campus.”

A New England based school administrator explained of his school, “(Our school) has been in existence for 20 years. During those years, we have grown organically and sustained steady growth at a pace that we could handle. To date, we do not heavily market the school since our facility is maxed to its capacity and we have students on a waiting list. We have always relied on word of mouth advertising and then trying to do everything with a ‘spirit of excellence’ that would perpetuate continued word of mouth advertising. The school seeks to operate in a spirit of excellence that would be pleasing to God and therefore show value to the Customers. We strive to create a safe and secure environment in each classroom, which will put our parents at ease and grow their loyalty.”

A Pacific coast based school marketing leader noted, “Word of mouth advertising has worked the best. Where one sends a child to school is a decision parents take seriously. Knowing someone who has had a positive experience is a prime reason for looking into enrollment at our school. The website has played a minor role.” Another study participant mentioned that his school’s best advertisement was in the form of word of mouth. The next most successful ads were viewed as the Verizon Yellow Pages, church bulletins, and radio ads. A Canadian study respondent shared his beliefs that secular media is highly visible and it helps to bring credibility, but word of mouth is still his school’s strongest form of advertising as well.

A northern U.S. school uses a high tech method to share testimonials through word of mouth advertising. They explained, “One of the best buys we’ve had was to purchase video stream capabilities for our website. This allows us the capability to bring the

environment of the school to the prospective family immediately in their home or workplace. We've included testimonies from parents, teachers, and students.”

One U.S. participant claimed his school's best advertisements involve getting parents interested in marketing to their local churches, communities, and workplaces. He said, “It is hard to do, but when they do it it's effective and free.” Another school marketing colleague viewed parent to parent as the most effective form of advertising for his school as well. One Mid-Atlantic school administrator shared that her school advertised very sparingly and that word of mouth was her school's best tool. When asked which ads worked best for his school, a mid-western state study contributor answered, “Word of mouth by far, Radio has been good for getting the name of our school out there in the public.” An eastern Canadian school administrator shared, “We have tried radio, newspaper, church visits with student orchestra, and principal visits to local Christian elementary schools. The most effective form of advertisement seems to be parental word of mouth.”

A marketing director in a central U.S. state, also views word of mouth advertising as one of the strongest marketing tools for her school. Other successful advertising efforts mentioned by her include billboard signage, and membership in GPACS, Great Plains Alliance of Christian Schools. GPACS helps to spread the message of their member Christian schools throughout their designated market area. It has been observed that local church pastors feel more at ease supporting GPAC schools rather than one individual school. In an attempt to bolster word of mouth activities, a January mailing is sent to current school families. This mailer includes 10 business cards that can be handed out to others. If a family can help to recruit a new student they receive a referral tuition reduction.

Twenty-four schools involved in this study mentioned utilizing a referral program as an incentive to encourage more word of mouth activity. A number of different programs were divulged. One referral program gives parents a \$100 discount for every family

referred who enrolls. Another program offers any parents bringing new students to enroll can get a \$250 tuition discount per new student. A pastor's discount of \$250 per new student is also offered when a local pastor brings a new student. A Canadian school offers a \$50 tuition reduction in January for referring a family that stays enrolled until December. A U.S. school offers a \$300 credit to a referring family. Another U.S. school stated, "If an existing family refers a student they are offered a two month tuition credit, often they choose to share it with the new family as an incentive to enroll with us."

A mid-western U.S. school respondent shared, "Both referred and the referrers get a tuition break for a successful referral. Last year we enrolled 31 students with this program." Another mid-western U.S. school participant explained, "We have a family referral program that has proven to be very successful. New families must successfully complete a nine-week probationary period in order for the recruiting family to receive their discount." The respondent further explained, "A \$500 discount is credited to the referring family's account the first week of December. We believe this is a program that offers a cost-effective means of attracting good families to our school and blesses those families that are working to recruit for us. This is also a way for families that may be struggling with tuition to lower their costs through recruitment." One administrator suggested that it is wise for Christian schools to ensure new referral programs comply with their federal and local tax laws.

McMurtry (2003, p. 238) believes, "The most credible form of mass communications is publicity, or mentions and features in the non-paid media – news." In order to receive this free publicity, she suggests, "When preparing any type of information to send to the media, make sure that it is newsworthy. Newsworthy themes include: new products or services, how to suggestions or tips, trends, personnel news, awards or recognitions, community projects, or donation information." McMurtry feels a key point in receiving publicity is to establish a good working relationship with editors covering the field.

Position yourself as a source of credible, newsworthy information, not as someone seeking free publicity.

A new England study participant reported, “We routinely get our information in the Schools section of the local paper. The school’s staff has been a guest on the local morning news program. Often the school’s special events are also covered by the local press.” A school located in the southern U.S. often received good coverage of their athletic events. They also were able to receive coverage of some academic and extra/co-curricular accomplishments. Students who receive National Merit Recognition are highlighted in a local newspaper paid placement. A southwestern U.S. academy also mentioned being able to gain publicity through its sports programs. The school’s teams have played in public school state tournaments in basketball and volleyball.

A participant from a New England based Christian school explained, “We have been able to establish media ties with an effort of continued communication through news releases, phone calls, and a Christian media person with a former connection to the head of the school.” A Canadian academy leader shared, “The newspaper first called us to do a story, now I call them with potential stories. I also call the local Christian radio station with items of interest.” Another Canadian school has received publicity by having local radio stations carry interviews about their school mission trips to third world countries. On occasion, a western U.S. school leader shared that the local newspaper for interviews and articles contacts him. In establishing public relationship ties with the local media, a southern-based school marketing director explained, “It has been hard to establish, but slowly with dedication the local papers are now publishing our press releases. This has required phone calls, thank you letters when they have featured us, and repeat faxes or Emails about our press releases.”

A few schools mentioned that they have tried very hard to receive publicity. A southwestern U.S. Christian school said, “We try very hard to get the local newspaper to print articles about the school, but they are somewhat reluctant.” One administrator feels,

“If we are willing to pay, we have ties. No pay, no ties.” A northeastern American academy received very good press coverage when a parent helped to arrange a fly-in visit of a Sikorsky built Blackhawk helicopter. A number of schools mentioned media coverage during school prayer walks. During these events, students visit fire stations, police stations, military bases, hospitals, government offices, farms, and an assortment of other facilities. Occupants are then offered to join in with the prayer-warriors as they ask God to protect and help the workers prosper. One administrator felt uneasy about asking the press to cover the school’s prayer walk until she came to the realization that the mission of her school was to spread God’s good news. She thinks no better impression of her school could ever be created than what this event represents. The press did cover the event and it is now done annually.

Marketing Strategies that have Failed

The last research question explored within this study tries to identify if marketing strategies can be identified that have failed. The logic behind this area of study is to help other schools avoid similar pitfalls in their marketing operations. Names have been intentionally withheld to protect individuals who have confided potentially embarrassing school information. The opinions expressed throughout this report are solely those of the study participant and are only meant to represent individual cases unless noted otherwise.

One participant shared in regards to her school, “Radio is too expensive and it yields very small results.” Another study respondent stated, “I would say our newspaper advertisements do not reap the benefits we would like, compared to the cost of running the ads.” A colleague in Canada admitted, “Pretty much all of our advertisement campaigns have failed.” A southern based U.S. Christian school claimed, “We have tried many different marketing approaches, but we have never really monitored our efforts for success. That is probably very poor marketing, isn’t it?”

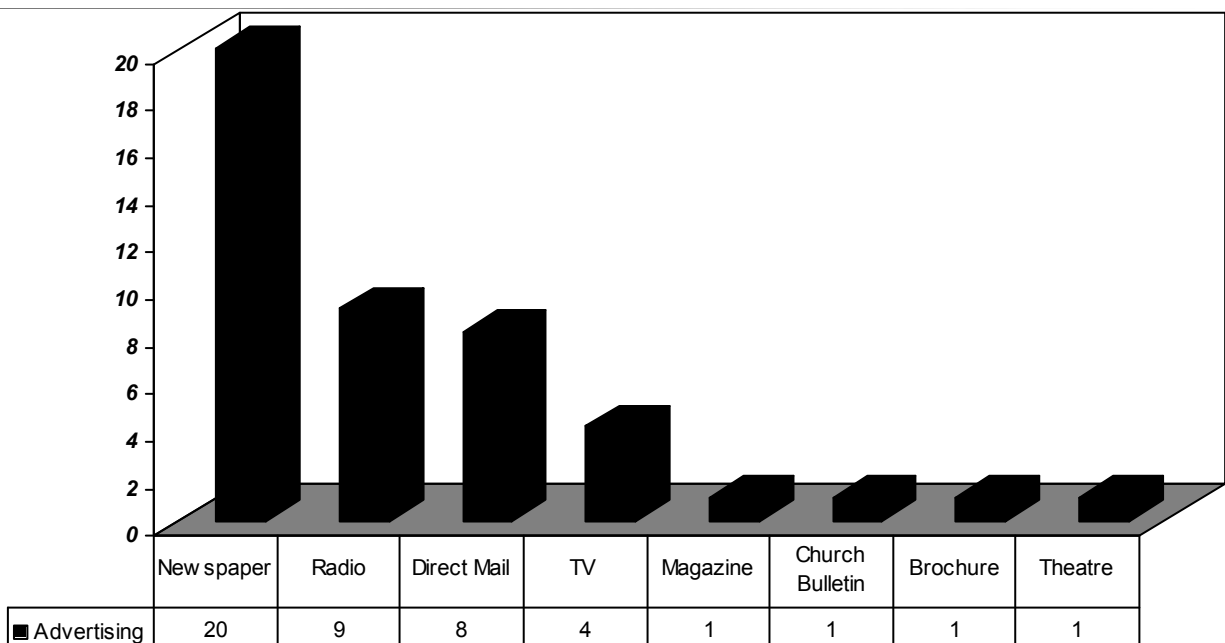
Study participants were asked to share if any ad campaigns had failed or faltered at their schools. Table 4.12 displays the data results from this question on the following page.

Table 4.12 Have any advertisement campaigns failed or faltered at your school

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	39	38.6
No	27	25.7
N/A	35	34.7

It would be nearly impossible to determine from the data set if fault lies with the schools or the media source. Figure 4.11 displays the media used in campaigns that faltered or failed. Earlier in the study, Figure 4.10 displayed some of these same media outlets as the source of positive campaigns.

Figure 4.11 Types of advertising media used during unsuccessful campaigns



A western U.S. Christian school conceded, “We did a mass mailing of a postcard type advertisement to specific homes within our zip code. It was not really a success.” An eastern U.S. school administrator stated, “The problem with advertising in large papers is

that they attract many folks that do not have our same values and we spend a lot of time filtering them out.” A Canadian school found local television advertising to be very expensive. They also admitted that the timing of their ad might have been poor. A southern U.S. school claimed, “We did a theatre commercial ad that was to run for twenty minutes before each set of previews. The campaign cost was \$5,000, but it was a bust. The ads ran to empty theatres for three months.”

A number of schools shared earlier that they had enjoyed success by partnering with local pastors, but a number also mentioned that their efforts to market to local churches failed miserably. One interviewee shared, “We sent invitations to all of the local church pastors for a facility tour and barely anybody showed up.” Another school had sent brochures to local churches in hopes that the pastors would pass them out and promote their Christian school. This marketing effort turned out to be quite costly and it was an unsuccessful venture.

While most administrators have no background in marketing and public relations, those can be the skills that make or break their careers, according to Nora Carr, senior vice president of public relations for Luquire-George Andrews, a media and communications firm in Charlotte, North Carolina (Delisio, 2004, Para 14). Marketing skills can also be what makes or breaks Christian schools. At least five study participants shared that their schools do not track marketing efforts for results. One participant felt that his school’s marketing efforts were too difficult to monitor and he viewed the entire process as casting bread upon the waters, hoping that each effort contributed in part to overall success. An administrator from a southern U.S. school proclaimed, “We tend to be frugal with money, so when things fail, we don’t do them again.” Because measurements and assessments are key components in classroom curriculum and management models, it may seem surprising that a school’s leadership team would continue in their marketing efforts without any evaluations and yet this occurs regularly. A quote from comedian Tom Bodett may help to put this phenomenon into a clearer

perspective. Bodett said (ThinkExist.com), “The difference between school and life? In school, you're taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you're given a test that teaches you a lesson.”

Summary

This chapter provided a look at the questionnaire feedback from Christian school administrators and those involved with the marketing efforts of their schools. The themes that were presented in this chapter relied upon descriptive narratives from the 101 different individuals who agreed to participate in this study. Due to the qualitative nature of this project, a large number of quotes were shared. When possible data was collectively tabulated and presented in graph or table formats. Some trends began to emerge that identified similar marketing strategies, but no two schools were alike in their positioning efforts. The OCTOPUS plan was used extensively to categorize the different marketing components and strategies of Christian school operations. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the research findings, a further explanation behind the OCTOPUS plan acronym, possible benefits and uses from this effort, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

This project, A Descriptive Study of the Marketing Mix Strategies Utilized by North American Christian Schools, was designed to investigate how Christian schools throughout Canada and the United States view marketing and how the schools conduct their marketing operations. Utilizing qualitative research processes, a specially designed questionnaire was developed. Interviewees were encouraged to provide open-ended feedback designed to answer the following study questions:

1. Are marketing mix components and strategies evident in the operations of Christian schools?
2. Do Christian schools operate with written marketing plans?
3. Who is responsible for developing a Christian school's marketing plans?
4. Can successful marketing operations be identified?
5. Can marketing strategies be identified that have failed?

The data collected from the 101 Christian school participants, the literary research study, and the life experiences of this marketer and his dissertation committee, have provided the means to answer all five of the above study questions with the utmost of confidence.

A new marketing strategy was designed to assist in this endeavor. The plan has been illustrated as the OCTOPUS plan. OCTOPUS serves as an acronym that represents the phrase "Operational characteristics tactfully outlining productive, uplifting schools."

There are eight categories highlighted in the OCTOPUS plan and it just so happens that an octopus has eight muscular arms. The eight arms of the OCTOPUS plan all start with

the letter “P” and include Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Partnering, Processes, Possibilities, and Pleasing (to God).

The term OCTOPUS works nicely for many other reasons too as further research at Wikipedia.org (2006) revealed that octopuses are, as an analogy, highly intelligent. Octopuses are probably the most intelligent of any of the invertebrates. Christian schools must also be intelligent in their marketing efforts. Most octopuses can eject a thick blackish ink in a large cloud to aid in escaping from predators. Christian school marketing operations can also dispense a good deal of ink in their printing efforts, but ideally, they are not just clouding the waters. Octopuses also can change their color and reflect or refract light. Many Christian schools would be wise to change their colors or reflect the good practices of other schools. When under attack, some octopuses can autotomize, or detach, their limbs. The wiggling arm serves as a distraction to would-be predators. For Christian schools, when it comes to marketing, drawing attention to a special feature can be life saving as well.

Octopuses have a relatively short life span, and some species live for as little as six months. Larger species, such as the North Pacific Giant Octopus, may live for up to five years under suitable circumstances. A Christian school marketing plan should be reviewed every six months and it should be forward looking for at least five years. According to Schofield (2005, Para 9), it is important to update marketing plans on a regular basis. The tactics that proved successful one year may fall flat if market conditions alter drastically. Arrangements should be made to review and update marketing plans frequently. Reviewing every quarter would be ideal, but if that is not feasible, do so at least once each year.

In laboratory experiments, octopuses can be readily trained to distinguish between different shapes and patterns. They are able to open jars after learning from observation. Octopuses have keen eyesight and they have an excellent sense of touch. They even have the ability to taste what they are touching. Christian school marketers had better be able

to identify patterns, learn quickly, and develop keen senses or they will soon face perils of their own. Octopuses often break out of their secured tanks and sometimes into others in search of food. They have even boarded fishing ships and opened holds to eat crabs. This examiner feels that Christians should aggressively recruit students from public schools, but they should not attempt to steal students from other Christian schools.

An octopus' only means of fast travel is swimming. They crawl by walking on their arms, usually on many at once, on solid surfaces, while supported in water. In 2005, it was reported that some octopuses could walk on two arms on a solid surface. If sound marketing skills are not utilized, a Christian school can find itself underwater and swimming fast just to survive.

A common belief is that when stressed, an octopus may begin to eat itself. However, limited research conducted in this area has revealed that the cause of this abnormal behavior may be a virus that attacks the octopus's nervous system. Thus, this behavior may be more correctly labeled as a mental disease. Could it be possible that some Christian schools were destroyed through poor marketing efforts and stress? This reviewer whole-heartedly believes the answer to this question is yes.

Octopuses are also quite strong for their size. They have been known to catch and kill some species of sharks. A Christian school should be operated as a strong entity as well. One that is able to defend itself and solve problems based on the precepts of the Bible. Earth's highest mountains and lowest valleys are found under the oceans surface. By utilizing the OCTOPUS plan, Christian schools should be able to navigate their operations with more confidence and avoid perilous depths.

It should now be clearer as to why the acronym OCTOPUS was chosen to represent the new marketing plan for Christian schools. Hopefully, the OCTOPUS plan will be "catchy" enough to allow for easy memorization amongst those involved with Christian school marketing. Large amounts of money, time, and effort are regularly spent on naming new products and services and building brand awareness. The octopus analogies

provided above seemed to be nearly providential. Such a strong name and character association, along with an acronym, is rare even in the world of marketing. Proverbs 22:1 (Bible Gateway, 2005) provides, “A good name is more desirable than great riches.”

Summary of Findings

Overall, the 101 Christian school marketing leaders who took part in this study spoke positively about their experience. This project was framed by research questions that were presented in Chapter 1. Based on the data analysis presented in Chapter 4, the findings are offered here in summary form. Each of the five research questions of this study will be answered in this section along with supporting data.

Research Question 1:

The first research question was designed to identify which marketing mix components and strategies were evident in the operations of Christian schools. This question was based upon the eight strategies and components within the OCTOPUS plan. As highlighted in Chapter 4, all eight of these areas: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Partnering, Processes, Possibilities, and being Pleasing to God were all identified. Therefore the answer to research question one is that all eight marketing areas of the OCTOPUS plan were evident. It is noteworthy to repeat, 94 out of the 101 study participants endorsed the OCTOPUS plan.

Research question 2:

This question was devised to find if Christian school operations were conducted within the framework of written marketing plans. Schofield (2005, Para 2) suggested, “Think of a marketing plan as a road map to assist you in setting and realizing goals and keeping you on course. Your marketing plan is a crucial element of a business plan. It consists of information about your company and its products or services, marketing activities objectives and strategies, and your method for measuring success. Typically, it outlines the marketing activities you'll perform during a designated time period (generally

six months or one year). In it you'll document the costs of your planned marketing activities as well as the measurements used to determine success.”

Surprisingly, the interviews and survey responses revealed that only 15 of the 101 participating schools had a written marketing plan in place that was reviewed by the staff and referred to for policy decisions. Forty participants stated that their schools had partially complied with some sort of marketing plan effort and 46 Christian schools revealed that they did not have a written marketing plan.

This researcher feels that Christian schools should utilize written marketing plans because they can help to establish a more cohesive workplace. By gathering input from stakeholders, a covenant can actually be created that drives a school's operations. A marketing plan does not need to be rigid. It can and should allow for flexibility and creative efforts. By utilizing a written marketing plan as a playbook or a guide, basic operational knowledge can be understood and adapted more readily. Christian schools should consider that God took time to re-write the Ten Commandments after the first copy was destroyed. Contemplate for a moment as to where would Christians be without the Written Word of God? Now, please consider what a written marketing plan could do for a Christian school.

Research question 3:

This study question was designed to explore who was responsible for developing a Christian school's marketing plans. Interviewees mentioned school administrators most often, followed by the board of directors, development directors, and superintendents. Marketing or public relations professionals were employed at 27.7% of the Christian schools involved with the survey. To help in the development of marketing strategies, outside firms or consultants had been used at 34.7% of the schools.

Research question 4:

This question is supported by an extensive amount of participant feedback. Quotes and survey data are provided in great detail throughout chapter four of this report. This

data proves that successful marketing operations can be identified. Each area of the OCTOPUS plan was considered when looking for positive marketing strategies. In the area of promotion, study participants noted that word of mouth advertising, or buzz marketing, was the best form of advertising by a better than 4:1 ratio over the next best form of advertising, radio. Marketing colleagues were asked to share strategies or advice in order to help others better serve, this information is located in Appendix F.

Research Question 5:

The primary emphasis behind research question five was to identify marketing strategies that have failed. Although not as many failing strategies were identified as successful ones, failing strategies were identified. Most of these failing strategies were from the promotional area of the OCTOPUS plan.

The participants that shared their school's failures now realize what caused their shortcomings. Their perspectives are now much clearer and they have modified their marketing operations to improve their efforts. It is quite possible that other Christian school marketing strategies are currently failing, but if that is so, colleagues in charge of floundering programs may not realize them to be unsuccessful yet. Famous industrialist, Dale Carnegie once said, "Develop success from failures. Discouragement and failure are two of the surest stepping stones to success" (ThinkExist.com). Former U.S. Secretary of State and retired General, Colin Powell also offered encouragement when he stated, "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure" (ThinkExist.com). Job, in the Old Testament of the Bible, faced many terrible setbacks but he remained true to God and was rewarded with far more than, with what he began.

Discussion and Conclusions

If for no other reason, according to the Holy Scriptures, the marketing leaders of Christian schools should be excited because their positions offer them an opportunity to be harbingers of the truth, the way, the life, and the return of Jesus. Their efforts to

promote Christian schools can and should have eternal effects. Jesus stated very clearly in John 15:16 (Bible Gateway), “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Jesus also explained in Matthew 6:33, (Bible Gateway), “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” By utilizing strong marketing techniques, it is possible to share God’s Word and His salvation message.

Christian schools can essentially reach out through their marketing efforts and witness to the whole community. Marketing does not need to be glamorous, flashy, intimidating, or intrusive. It simply needs to be informational and truthful, especially for Christian schools. A Christian children’s song may best express the marketing effort this observer endorses. The words of this song state, “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.” The words are so simple and yet so wise. In Matthew 18:3 (Bible Gateway), Jesus warned the high-minded, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” It is an awesome responsibility to serve as one of God’s ambassadors and yet that is exactly what Christian school marketers are within their role.

After being contacted for involvement with this study, one school provided the following Email response, “After showing the survey to our administrator, she respectfully declined to participate. She doesn't feel she has the time, or should take the time during school hours, and to be truthful, we do not do any real marketing. Thank you for contacting us, and may God richly bless your efforts.” God did bless this effort and it is due to Him and the input of the wonderful, God-fearing, marketing soldiers and contributors. By standing together collectively in an effort to improve the impact of Christian education, it required a good deal of trust, time, and effort. The school members that did become involved with this study should be commended for their input and willingness to share sensitive marketing information. Through these efforts may all of God’s schools flourish!

Due to the unique nature of this study, there are no directly comparable reports involving Christian schools and their marketing efforts. Only a few other studies of its kind were located that dealt with the general subject of school marketing. Discussions of a few of these studies are included below to supplement and support this study. There were no findings of any contrary results or reports.

Malherbe (2005) defended a study about private school marketing efforts in Gauteng, South Africa. His study involved six private schools. He found that much of the general fear and antagonism towards marketing in private schools was due to a misunderstanding of what marketing is about. Many administrators felt that it simply involved selling. He reported that most private schools in America have hired marketing professionals. However, this report revealed that only one in three of the participating Christian schools had hired skilled, professional marketers. Marketing efforts of private schools in South Africa was viewed as a relatively new concept in his report. He felt that interaction between the marketing approaches of private schools and the community and industry in South Africa would encourage and promote not only more effective school facilities and resources but also promote quality learner achievements.

The Naperville, Illinois Community Unit School District 203 (2005) is currently involved in the third year of a study with researchers at the University of Illinois. This effort hopes to determine if providing accurate information through Social Norms marketing positively affects parent and teen perceptions, behavior, and healthy decision making. In August of 2005, parents were asked to complete an important survey included in student registration packets. According to the local data, 67% of high school students choose not to drink because they do not want to disappoint their parents. The local parents were congratulated for participating at such a statistically significant level - a 48% return. The participation response rate for the Christian school marketing study achieved an even higher response of 50.5% return.

Many schools opt to conduct their own marketing studies. In some cases a consortium of schools are involved. The Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts, recently conducted one such study. In *Connections* (2006), a diocese publication, it was revealed that perceptions about their 30 schools could help in their messaging and marketing planning. For example, while Catholic school students generally do very well on standardized tests, the public was not aware of that fact. In addition, because their teachers are generally perceived as being paid at a lower rate than at public schools, a perception arose that they may be less qualified. “What we’re learning from this research is that we can do a better job promoting our schools as second to none in terms of student outcomes and teacher qualifications,” Superintendent Perla added. After completing their study, the strategic plan calls for the creation of a comprehensive marketing plan to advance positive messages. “We’re gaining insight into what messages will resonate within our communities and how to better position our schools and reach out more aggressively than we have in the past,” Superintendent Perla said. This kind of study is highly endorsed among marketing professionals. One of the future goals of the Christian school OCTOPUS plan is to assist schools in the creation of their own unique marketing plan. Perla concluded, “Ultimately we want to express to more children and families our faith and values, not only to provide students with a great education but also to do the work of the Gospel.”

Peltier and Westfall (2004) recently conducted a marketing study in the Sheboygan Area School District (SASD) to determine what items were significantly important in the minds of parents. From the utilization of a SWOT Analysis and regression analysis, strengths and weaknesses were identified. It became necessary for these researchers to also gather informational data on-line as well as through personal interviews. Of the 123 called only 36 completed the survey, 41 did not answer after five attempts to contact, 23 of the numbers were disconnected, and 23 of the parents refused to take the survey. The most important items to parents included: (1) Schools provide caring and encouraging

environments. (2) There is an availability of college prep or advanced placement courses. (3) Quality teachers are employed by the district. (4) There is a qualified school board. And lastly, (5) Internal marketing and communications are professionally conducted.

One of the biggest weaknesses observed in the SASD study was that there was not enough persuasive information circulating around to parents. This lack of persuasive information was causing the parents to develop false perceptions about the school district according to the report. By increasing the amount of persuasive information that the parents received, it was felt that these false perceptions could be overcome and the realities discovered. According to the report, some areas of fictions, myths, or false perceptions and persuasive counter messages included: (1) Teachers are better qualified in private, charter and smaller schools. (2) Private, charter and smaller schools are safer than public schools. (3) Private, charter and smaller schools have fewer discipline problems. (4) Students have more opportunities to excel in private, charter or smaller schools. (5) Students in private, charter or smaller schools outperform public-school students on standardized tests. (6) Students in private, charter or smaller schools have a better chance of getting into the best colleges than students in public schools. Lastly, (7) Course work is not as challenging in public schools as in private schools.

This Christian school marketing report exposed that many of the above so-called false perceptions were actually true at many of the participating schools. The public needs to be made aware of these facts so students and parents can make educational choices based on facts, not hearsay. The SASD study also identified from its responses that the district does not use the press as well as it could. To “get the word out,” the district was encouraged to use the free media to all extent possible. One suggested option for staffing in this area was to hire interns from local colleges. The SASD study said that press releases should be submitted on current activities in the district, including sporting events, scholastic awards, community events, and community course offerings. Technological advances and opportunities that arise from this area should also be

communicated through press releases. Publicity from within this area can include on-line coursework, study help resources, and school website information. The OCTOPUS plan views these efforts as buzz marketing and highly endorses the practice.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are minimal. Christian school administrators strongly embraced and supported this project in order to increase their student enrollments, satisfy and maintain current enrollees, enhance their school's image, and improve overall operations. The over-riding philosophy of this study was designed to benefit and further the reach of Christian education. However, about half of the contacted school administrators passed at answering the questionnaire. The interview process required a substantial sacrifice of time and an administrator's willingness to share strategic marketing information, information that could potentially be used by other nearby Christian schools. Any requests for anonymity were granted in order to protect the identity of any Christian administrator or school. Once completed, the dissertation data was made available via the Internet or CD to any administrator that agreed to participate in this study. No other forms of compensation were offered.

A survey questionnaire was conducted through telephone and Internet communications. Some answers provided were unverifiable. It is possible that some administrators offered responses that included a degree of puffery in order to give a more positive portrayal of their school and their management skills. Parker (2004, Para 6) points out that, "Optimism is necessary when motivating employees; however, it is dangerous when planning and forecasting. A large body of research shows that people tend to exaggerate the degree of control they have over events, discounting the role played by dumb luck." Parker also found that executives and entrepreneurs are highly

susceptible to these biases. He feels business leaders routinely exaggerate their personal abilities, especially for hard-to-measure traits like managerial skill. Parker points out that these leaders are also prone to thinking that they are in control more than they actually may be. It should be noted however, that this observer found no obvious attempts to brag or mislead during the data collection phase of this study. Not only is the feedback trusted, the study participants are highly admired and respected for their daily Christian activities and efforts.

Lastly, this study was designed to represent Christian schools throughout North America. A contact list was designed for this study. It included 200 select Christian schools that were identified through Internet searches, the ACSI member school web site (ACSI, 2005), and the CSI member school web site (CSI, 2005). Of the schools contacted, 50.5% agreed to be involved. Every state in America is represented by at least one school. Nine of the ten Canadian provinces are also represented. Due to financial and time constraints, this research study was limited to schools with modern technological capabilities such as the Internet, phone, and fax systems. As pointed out in chapter four, a strong cross-representative sample of Christian schools throughout the United States and Canada was achieved within this study.

Recommendations for Further Research and Practice

Two hundred Christian schools were encouraged to participate in this study through numerous phone and Email invitations. Surprisingly, 101 of these schools agreed to participate. The questionnaire for this study was quite lengthy with 51 questions spanning over four typewritten sheets of paper. Most of the questions were open-ended to allow for the greatest possible freedom of answers and thought. Many phone interviews extended

well over one hour in length. Due to the size of the topic, marketing, a wide variety of topics were covered. Future researchers could select from any of the eight areas of the OCTOPUS plan for a more extensive study. The areas of partnering, promotion, and price were areas of confusion for some schools. There was also a good deal of interest towards referral and tuition reduction programs.

A few of the Christian schools that declined to participate in this study gave the appearance of operating within a cloak of secrecy. These schools may have just been wary of a stranger contacting them, but they gave the impression of trying to withhold critical information from others. Further studies could explore the openness of Christian schools and their willingness to help others. This researcher always believed in action similar to what an old Christian song proclaims, "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born." However, in some areas of North America, there is apparent one-upmanship between Christian schools and churches and this has led to direct competition and in some cases contention. A southwestern Christian school administrator stated, "Christian schools should strive for an atmosphere of unity as discussed in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. Christian schools should not tear down others."

Further research into the mission statements of Christian schools could also be beneficial. A study of this kind could help shed light on how growth, witnessing, safety, and security play a role in today's Christian schools. For those planning marketing strategies, it would also be helpful to know how parents and stakeholders would prefer their associated Christian school to be designed. This sort of study would fall within the OCTOPUS plan categories of product and place.

Another area suggested for further study is the Canadian provincial funding of Christian schools. This financial aspect was introduced but not thoroughly discussed within this report. There are still many issues with this funding plan to be worked out in Canada. Different legal challenges have already surfaced. As school choice proponents

push for legislative changes in the United States, this funding initiative could serve as a benchmark. Additional research within this funding area may help to clarify the current policies, positions, and opportunities within Canada and potentially the United States.

As mentioned earlier, there will probably never be a perfect one-size fits all marketing plan for Christian schools. The diversity and uniqueness of each school and its marketing plan helps to peak interest and curiosity. Whether a campus serves as a safe haven for church member families and Christian students or as tools to spread, God's Word is simply one of a multitude of potential differentiations. Through prayer, hard work, and self-development of a personalized OCTOPUS plan for each Christian school this researcher firmly believes that Christian schools can and will become more effective and efficient. It is the prayer of this doctoral candidate that all Christian school marketers strive for the level described within 2 Timothy 2:15 (Bible Gateway, NIV), "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

This study has revealed that there is a tremendous amount of interest in Christian school marketing. This writer plans to use the knowledge and insights gained from this study to help Christian schools in the development efforts of their individual marketing plans. It is the belief of this researcher that the future of Christian education looks very positive. Christian school leaders must fully grasp that education is not only an effort to win over the hearts and minds of their students; it should be viewed as a massive search and rescue operation of eternal souls. Marketing efforts help to alert people of your actions and efforts. Written marketing plans help to clarify the mission and tasks of a school to the internal team members. Appendix F is an all-inclusive list of beneficial marketing quotes provided by the study participants. These suggestions were designed to help fellow Christian schools better serve through their marketing efforts.

In researching the product/service area of Christian school marketing, the selection of quality curriculum was very important across the entire educational spectrum, from

students needing special services all the way to advanced placement students. Christian school leaders must be cognizant that they answer to a much Higher Authority than the public schools. Further research into Christian school accreditation and accountability issues are worthy areas of further study.

Marketing should not be viewed as a proud, arrogant, and boastful tool. Marketing should be viewed as an instrument that is capable of spreading good, powerful, and positive news throughout the community. People need to know that Christian schools offer outstanding educational programs, employ quality teachers, and provide spectacular extra-curricular opportunities. If the above-mentioned areas are not true then a re-focusing effort within the product and place areas of the OCTOPUS plan should transpire prior to any promotional efforts.

Further development of the OCTOPUS plan will take place in an effort to bolster and support Christian schools as they work to fully utilize their market potential and impact. After successfully completing this research for the Liberty University dissertation process, this graduate plans to publish a marketing guidebook to be culled from this study. It will be designed from the personal administrator interviews and the information gathered from literary research pertaining to the current trends of private school marketing and an array of personal experiences. The book will be a call to action. It will help Christian schools to develop their own personalized OCTOPUS plan.

According to an old adage, by failing to plan, one is actually planning to fail. Angier (1998, p.167) points out in his survival book, "Just as darkness is merely the lack of light and cold the absence of warmth, getting lost is also a completely negative circumstance. You get lost not because of anything you do but because of what you fail to do. You stay found by keeping track of where you are." It is this doctoral candidate's conclusion as well as prayer that this dissertation effort will help Christian schools to be found, operate more efficiently, and function more effectively in their efforts to serve their customers and ultimately God.

In closing, it should be noted that there is a second definition provided for the word of octopus as presented in Encarta (2006). This octopus definition states, “Something with far-reaching influence: something, especially an organization, which has many branches and forms of influence or control.” So may it be for the OCTOPUS plan and for Christian schools.

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APPENDIX A
School Marketing Questionnaire
(Conducted by Dave Horner – Liberty University - email:ddhorner@liberty.edu)

This study has been designed to showcase positive marketing strategies and expose potential marketing pitfalls that fellow believers have experienced. By working together, Christian schools can strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of their marketing efforts. By agreeing to participate in this study, you will not only bless others, an electronic copy of the final report will be made available to you in early 2006. This final report promises to be a very helpful marketing tool.

1. **Name of School:**
2. **Address:**
3. **Phone:**
4. **School Administrator Interviewed:**
5. **Date of Completion:**
6. **Level of Education Served:**
7. **School Founded:**
8. **Student Enrollment:**
9. **School is located in: (urban, rural, or suburban) area?**
10. **Which socio-economic group would best identify the student's households?(upper, upper-middle, middle, mid-lower or lower)**

This study will refer to the American Marketing Association (AMA 2004) definition for marketing as being, "an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders."

**11. Do you agree with the above AMA marketing definition?
If not, why?**

From the statements below please choose one of these answers >	Fully/Mostly Compliant (Agree)	Partial compliance (somewhat)	Not compliant (disagree)
12. Based on the AMA marketing definition, the school has a written marketing plan that is regularly reviewed by the staff and referred to for all policy decisions.			
13. If applicable, who developed the plan? Additional comments area:			
14. The physical facilities at this school are visually appealing, clean, and in good repair. Visitors are impressed.			
15. The school is " _____ " years old Comment area:			
16. The physical layout of the school makes it easy for people to find their way around campus, park their cars, and locate rooms.			
17. Does the school provide a secure environment? Comment area:			
18. Students have been notified that their behavior is reflective on their school and that they are to honorably serve as ambassadors at all times.			
Comment area:			
19. All school staff members are treated as integral partners to maintain the school's successful operations and image. Staff input and feedback is relished and encouraged – including marketing efforts.			
20. How so? Comment area:			
21. The staff is consistently courteous, professional, and caring towards the best interests and success of the school and its community			
Comment area:			
22. The school utilizes technologies such as the Internet to provide services, communications, and information.			

Comment area:		
23. Materials associated with the school are visually appealing and professional in manner (such as notices, report cards, or statements).		
24. Is the school logo professionally designed?		
Comment area:		

- 25. Who (what groups of people) have been identified as current customers and stakeholders?
- 26. Have prospective groups been identified for recruiting purposes? If so, who?
- 27. What is the school's current tuition rate for one child (can be averaged)?
- 28. How was the tuition rate established?
- 29. Is the school able to maintain break-even or profitable operations?
- 30. At what percentage of full enrollment capacity is the school currently operating?
- 31. What differentiates your school from other schools / Why should parents and students choose your school over others? (please really showcase here)
- 32. How are parents made to feel included and involved at the school?
- 33. What marketing efforts are used to instill school pride in the students?
- 34. Does the school advertise? 35. If so how?
- 36. If applicable, which advertisements have worked best for the school?
- 37. Have any advertisement campaigns faltered? 38. If so, which?
- 39. What events/efforts are used to raise the local community awareness of the school?

40. Has the school been able to establish any ties with the local media for public relations?

41. If so, how?

42. Has your school established any cooperative partnerships with local businesses, churches, or community groups (sponsorships, contests, cooperative advertising, signage, revenue opportunities, supplies, or other support)?

43. Are referral programs utilized by the school for enrollment purposes?

44. If so, how?

45. Does your school employ marketing or public relations professionals?

46. Has the school ever used the services of an outside firm to develop any marketing strategies?

47. If so, were these services found to be beneficial?

A new marketing Strategy, known as the OCTOPUS plan identifies eight focus areas for Christian schools to address as they develop their own unique marketing mix:

1. **PRODUCT**/Services offered
2. **PRICE** to be charged - and why?
3. **PLACE** - local demo/psycho-graphics (site & grounds)
4. **PROMOTION** - expand customer base and keep current customers informed
5. **PARTNERSHIPS** - build alliances - people and business referral networks
6. **PROCESSES** - the way things are done - streamlined and reviewed often
7. **POSSIBILITIES** - ideas for improvement or growth - never stop exploring!
8. **PLEASING to God!!!** Saved for last but must be first in all operations.

48. Are you in agreement with these eight focus areas?

49. If not, what changes would you suggest?

50. In order to help fellow Christian schools to better serve, can you think of any other beneficial marketing strategies or advice that you would be willing to share that has been left out of this questionnaire?

51. Any requests for anonymity will be granted. Do you have any objections to your name or school being identified in this study or any follow-up publications?

An electronic copy of this study will be sent to you upon completion in early 2006. Please provide the preferred email address to receive the report:

**Thank you for your participation in this study and for your Christian service.
I pray that God richly blesses you and your school.**

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire Design

Due to the nature of this research effort, neither proven tests nor models were available for this doctoral candidate to reference or resource. Therefore, a questionnaire was designed in order to answer the research questions guiding this study, *A Descriptive Study of the Marketing Mix Strategies Utilized by North American Christian Schools*. Universal, open-ended marketing and demographic questions were created to fulfill the data collection process. The supporting questions are displayed in Appendix A, the School Marketing Questionnaire.

<p>1. Are marketing mix components and strategies evident in the operations of Christian schools?</p> <p><i>Support Questions: 1,6,9,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33,34,39,40,41,42,43,44,50</i></p>
<p>2. Do Christian schools operate with written marketing plans?</p> <p><i>Support Questions: 12</i></p>
<p>3. Who is responsible for developing a Christian school's marketing plans?</p> <p><i>Support Questions: 13,19,20,45,46,47</i></p>
<p>4. Can successful marketing operations be identified?</p> <p><i>Support Questions: 8,11,14,15,16,18,19,21,22,23,24,25,29,30,31,32,36,40,41,48,49,50</i></p>
<p>5. Can marketing strategies be identified that have failed?</p> <p><i>Support Questions: 14,15,16,18,21,29,30,37,38,50</i></p>

General and demographic questions: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,27

APPENDIX C

The Ten Essential Features of a Quality School

On the majority of the top ten issues identified as most essential to a good school, independent schools are seen as well ahead of their public school counterparts. Table B illustrates these findings.

1. Employing high quality teachers

This feature was rated by 73% of the public as essential to a quality school.

Independent schools were recognized by 47% of the poll's respondents as "employing high quality teachers;" by contrast, 22% of those surveyed associated this characteristic with public schools.

2. Preventing drug and alcohol use

This feature was rated by 68% of the public as essential to a quality school.

When poll respondents compared independent schools with their public school counterparts on "preventing drug and alcohol use," 36% of the public believed that independent schools were more closely associated with this characteristic than public schools. Only 17% of the public believed that public schools were more effective at preventing drug and alcohol use.

3. Keeping students motivated and enthusiastic about learning

This feature was rated by 67% of the public as essential to a quality education.

Forty-one percent of the public view independent schools as effective at "keeping students motivated and enthusiastic about learning" as contrasted with the public school rating of 14%.

4. Challenging students to do their best

This feature was rated by 66% of the public as essential to a quality education.

Nearly half (46%) of those polled believed that independent schools are "challenging students to do their best" while only 12% of poll respondents feel that to be most descriptive of public schools.

5. Encouraging parents to participate in their child's education

This feature was rated by 65% of the public as critical to a quality education.

Nearly half of the public (48%) believe that independent schools "encourage parents to participate in their child's education;" only 14% of the poll's respondents believe that to be more true of public schools.

6. Maintaining discipline

This feature was rated by 63% of the public as an essential characteristic of quality schools.

Sixty-three percent of the American public associate "maintaining discipline" with independent schools whereas only 11% of poll respondents believe that to be most descriptive of public schools.

7. Attending to the needs of children with learning disabilities

This feature was rated by 63% of the public as an essential feature of quality schools.

Public schools were seen by nearly half of the public (45%) as attending to the needs of children with learning disabilities; just 24% of the public associate this characteristic with independent schools.

8. Supporting a climate that says it is OK to study and excel

This feature was rated by 62% of the public as an essential characteristic of quality schools.

Almost half of those polled (48%) felt that independent schools "support a climate that says it is OK to study and excel;" just 10% of the public felt that would be most descriptive of public schools.

9. Preparing students academically for college

This feature was rated by 61% of the public as an essential characteristic of quality schools.

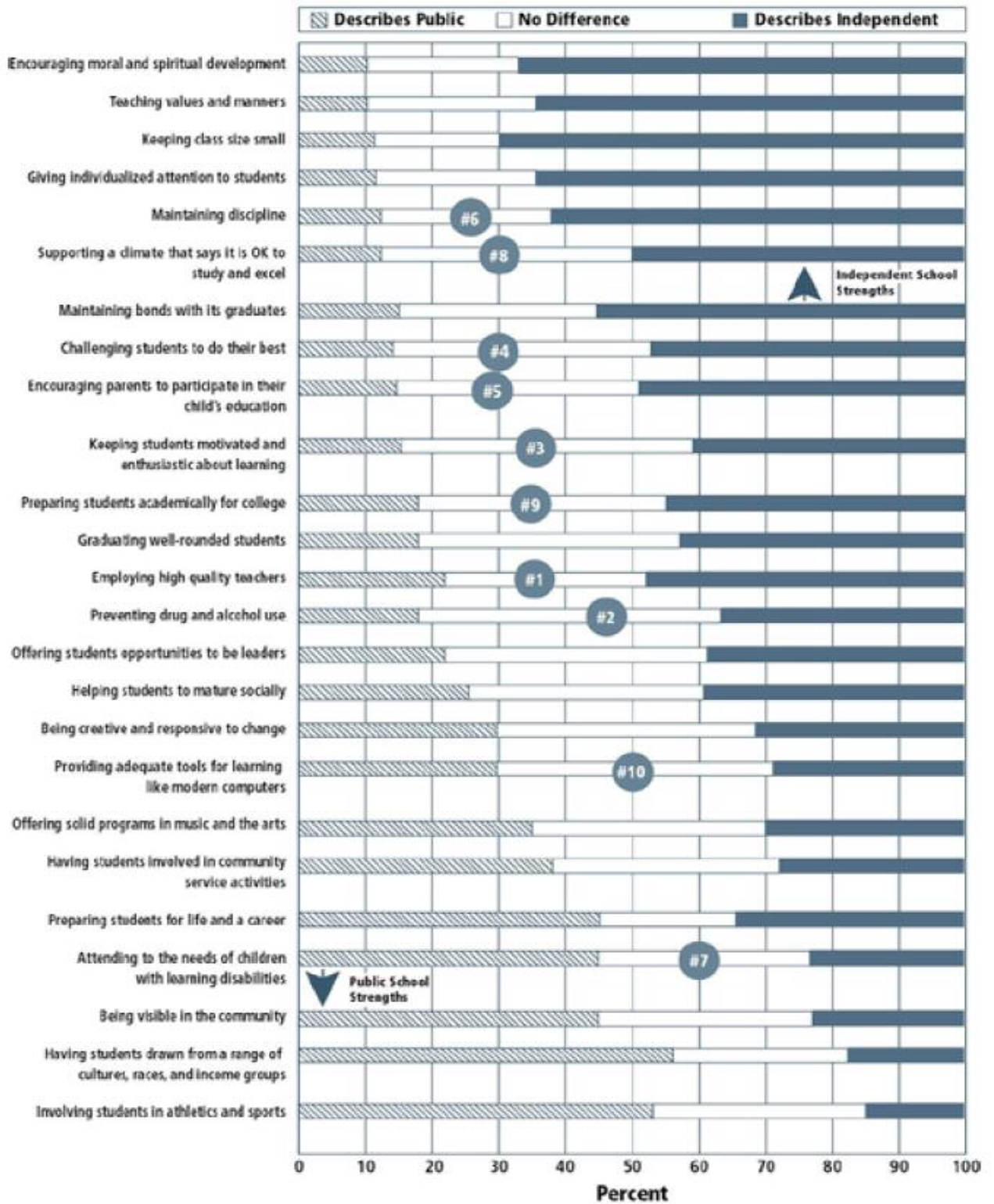
A majority of the poll's respondents (45%) believed that "preparing students academically for college" was most characteristic of independent schools; only 17% felt this to be more true of public schools.

10. Providing adequate tools for learning (like modern computers)

This feature was rated by 61% of the public as an essential characteristic of quality schools.

The public perceived little difference between public schools (30%) and independent schools (29%) in "providing adequate tools for learning (like modern computers)."

Table B – Public Perceptions of Independent School & Public School Differences



Source: National Association of Independent Schools (2002)

APPENDIX D

Religious Orientation of U.S. Private Schools

Religious or nonsectarian category	Schools		Students	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	29,273	100.0	5,341,513	100.0
Religious orientation	22,595	77.2	4,440,398	83.1
Roman Catholic	8,207	28.0	2,515,524	47.1
Amish	761	2.6	24,538	0.5
Assembly of God	429	1.5	66,038	1.2
Baptist	2,548	8.7	314,684	5.9
Brethren	60	0.2	8,142	0.2
Calvinist	135	0.5	39,079	0.7
Christian (unspecified)	4,135	14.1	603,624	11.3
Church of Christ	165	0.6	46,794	0.9
Church of God	183	0.6	13,786	0.3
Church of God in Christ	391	0.11	3,362	0.1
Episcopal	347	1.2	100,403	1.9
Friends	77	0.3	20,881	0.4
Greek Orthodox	30	0.1	4,562	0.1
Islamic	188	0.6	22,951	0.4
Jewish	730	2.5	198,478	3.7
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod	1,110	3.8	162,301	3.0
Evangelical Lutheran Church In America	116	0.4	16,137	0.3
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	411	1.4	35,584	0.7
Other Lutheran	59	0.2	5,375	0.1
Mennonite	393	1.3	23,670	0.4
Methodist	141	0.5	17,567	0.3
Pentecostal	582	2.0	39,300	0.7
Presbyterian	184	0.6	39,897	0.8
Seventh-Day Adventist	961	3.3	60,681	1.1
Other	602	2.1	57,039	1.1
Nonsectarian	6,678	22.8	901,114	16.9

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2005)

APPENDIX E

School Association Membership of U.S. Private Schools

Total number of religious private schools, students, and teachers (headcount), by membership in private school associations: United States, 2001-02			
Association	Schools	Students	Teachers
None	7,882	772,527	67,603
Religious			
Accelerated Christian Education	1,416	71,293	7,204
American Association of Christian Schools	1,072	154,209	12,885
Association of Christian Schools International	3,339	631,632	49,807
Association of Christian Teachers and Schools	222	37,060	3,061
Christian Schools International	401	97,225	7,126
Council of Islamic Schools in North America	41	5,660	532
Evangelical Lutheran Education Association	210	33,430	2,305
Friends Council on Education	77	19,421	2,333
General Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church	688	46,516	3,519
Jesuit Secondary Education Association	46	40,112	2,726
National Association of Episcopal Schools	259	83,779	9,191
National Catholic Educational Association	7,071	2,231,206	136,849
National Christian School Association	186	40,263	3,213
National Society of Hebrew Day Schools	208	62,789	5,899
Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship	121	24,446	2,034
Solomon Schechter Day Schools	55	15,495	1,842
Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools	142	32,012	2,696
Other religious school associations	2,640	506,550	40,379
NOTE: Private schools may belong to more than one association.			
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2001-2002. (NCES, 2005)			

APPENDIX F

Marketing Suggestions from study participants

(Gathered from answers to question #50 of the interview)

“The quality of your website is essential. We are constantly receiving phone calls as a result of interested families reviewing our website.”

“Christ must remain at the center of everything. Quite often, Christian schools begin veering toward the secular world with their programs and philosophy’s educating children. It is vital that Christ is in there in the forefront.”

“Have strong teacher qualifications and make them known”

“Word of mouth has been our best vehicle for marketing. Keep your own families happy and positive and they will get the word out to future families.”

“Find out how to appeal to kids and who the real decision makers are among your cliental.”

“Must walk with God in all operations”

“Utilize all available local programs and services to better your educational and extra-curricular offerings to your students. Even tap the public schools, clubs, and local governments when possible. Make yourself a valuable partner in the betterment of your community and others will help you in your efforts.”

“By far and away the best marketing tool is a strong base of former students who are now the contented parents of students - A long history of integrity.”

“Funding will be a challenge. Get your funds without raising your tuitions too much.”

“I think the best option is to develop close partnerships with local churches. It is effective and very inexpensive.”

“Develop a partnership with a local church through a matching scholarships program. Local church scholarships can be matched by the school or a foundation.”

“We were talking in staff today how important it is to cast the vision, keep the vision before the people, and revisit the details. We looked at our vision statement and many things had been accomplished. It’s time to see what God wants us to do next. This (study) has been very enjoyable. You have given me a lot to think about.”

“One must remember that ultimately a school is a learning community. Providing a quality educational product is vital. No amount of marketing strategy will make up for a lack of excellence in the education we provide.”

“Pray for wisdom and foresight...Not to waste time and money on efforts that won't work.”

“It is all about relationships and being personal. I believe that is the key because word of mouth is the strongest marketing tool.”

“Word of mouth is always the best...get the buzz out there that awesome things are happening at your school and keep the buzz going.”

“Christian schools need to adopt a mentality that realizes the need for marketing. Depending on the region of the country, many places may not know the value of Christian education. Our marketing efforts have been able to tell the story of our school and why it will provide something that other schools will not.”

“Branding your organization is very important and defining what is your promise.”

“I am fairly new to this myself so cannot share many strategies. We are trying to improve ourselves and have been very limited at times. I think that it was very beneficial for us to hire an outside firm when we didn't have any staff members with expertise. The company got us off to a good start and has given us materials/ideas to work with.”

“Christian schools must remember that they are a business as well as a school. Thinking in terms of marketing, branding, etc. will help increase the success of the business.”

“Re-recruit! Learn to be customer centered. Also, realize that your school's culture is the key to the right kind of re-recruitment.”

“Create a cycle of blessing. Most of the failure is due to leadership and fiscal responsibility. If schools who are in need found a place to give out, it would make room for a blessing. Too many hold onto the little they have with a white knuckle grip.”

“Share with other Christian schools – Build cooperative networks.”

“Host community events (such as Chamber of Commerce breakfasts)...this has been very successful in showcasing the school.”

“Be clear on your target population and stick to it.”

“Strong Christian character in students needs to be emphasized.”

“Build Relationships”

“Educate potential families – We do a program in which staff and others discuss Christian education in general and then our school in particular.”

“Clearly identify your target market”

“Everything is PR – Everything needs to be approached, communicated, and executed with the intention of communicating core values and positive values.”

“Track your efforts often.”

“Always focus on your mission, your philosophy drives your people, people drive the program, and the program drives the product.”

“Keep God centered and look for opportunities to be better. Make sure you are not unintentionally uninviting...both from a facilities standpoint and from a personnel.”

“Hiring is critical and so is screening for correct students.”

“Choose wisely in your spending, but remember cheapest is not always best. You must spend sometimes in order to make. By trying to be too tight and cheap, you usually end up getting what you paid for.”

“Follow God’s calling – Build it and they will come.”

“Get involved in your communities in any way that you possibly can.”

“If you spend energy on fundraising – evaluate your efforts.”

“Sometimes even the perception of a positive or negative aspect of a school can be an important aspect of people’s confidence in you.”

“Build up others – even other local Christian schools.”

“Clearly establish the brand of your school. Get out the word of how your school has values added throughout its programs.”

“Utilize person to person marketing. Establish partnerships with churches. Develop strong community relations.”

“Open houses are a very good marketing tool.”

“Encourage open communications, especially parent-teacher and consider multi-child discounts to help larger families.”

“Let everybody associated with the school that they are on the marketing team. The first contact person must be personable and represent the school well and the rest of the facility must also look good.”

“One of the most important things we do as a school is striving to meet the needs of our Customers in and outside of our school. We provide significant grants and scholarships to those who do not have the financial means. And most importantly, we strive to show God’s love to each parent during times of emotional need (death of a family member, terminal illness, divorces, etc.). We make hospital visits, fix meals for the grieving, provide counsel in time of need, and go out of our way to help whenever we can. We send letters home when we hear about anything happening in a distant family member as well. We want to be a light in this dark world and we want to show God’s love and acceptance no matter what the circumstances are for each person. In essence, minister to the needs of others as God asks us to; food, clothing, and shelter as well as emotional and financial needs. We love our students and our parents.”

“Put God first and He will market your school for you.”

“Be successful with the ones you have. In other words, if a school provides a truly superior program which offers the best value in the market, demand will be high. Excellence must be more than a motto, it must be real, pervasive, and at a world-class level.”

“Provide better follow-up of prospective clients; also quicker follow-up of completed students, which would positively impact the retention rate.”

“Stay aware of your local market; politically, economically, and spiritually. Often our battles are unseen. Pray, pray, and pray some more. Then give thanks loudly and clearly to those that have helped your school to achieve victory – especially God!”