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QUICK GUIDE

## USING DIGITAL MARKETING TO PROMOTE YOUR SCHOOL



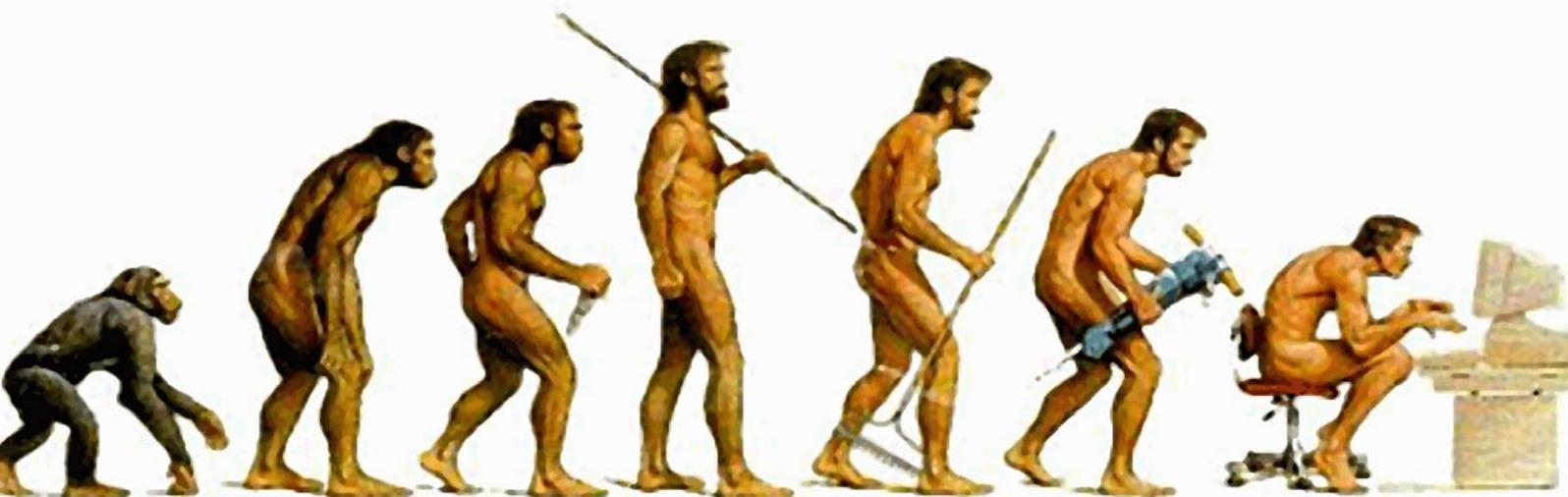
# The way to communicate about your schools is **evolving**

**Using digital marketing techniques can be a very cost-effective method of communicating with everyone involved with your school, academy or college.**

It can be used in a myriad of ways to connect with present and past pupils, potential pupils and their families and the broad spectrum of stakeholders that make up the complex landscape of opinion makers in today's education environment.

In this e-book we offer a few simple tips on how to capitalise on ideas that are practical and simple to apply.

Electronic marketing does however have its limitations – it is by its nature cold and somewhat impersonal without careful curation. Every educational establishment is a living, breathing entity. Telling your brand story may be best left to more tactile means such as a prospectus, and there is no substitute for a personal visit to demonstrate your true character.



# 1. Your website is at the heart of any communication

**Everyone knows how critical first impressions can be. Your school website is the first stop for potential and existing parents and pupils. Your aim is to make that first impression a lasting one.**

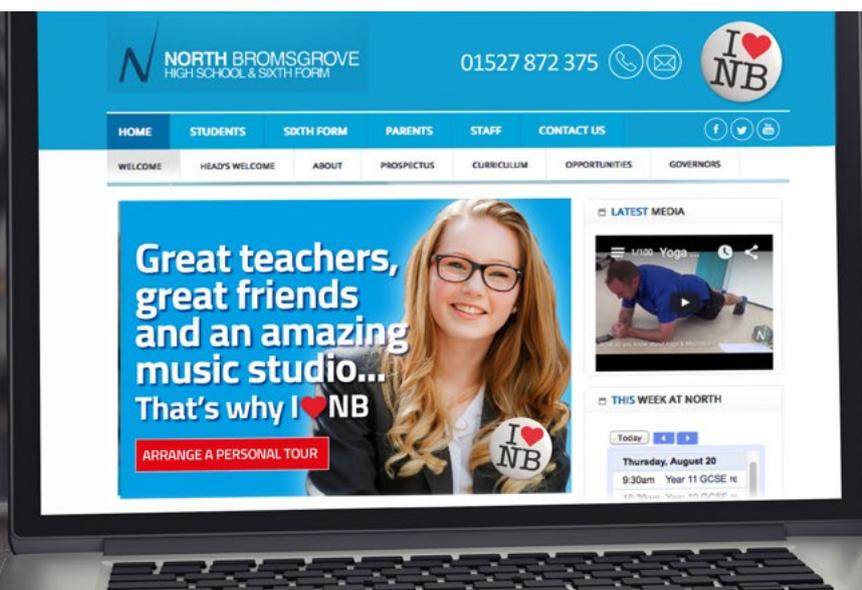
Your school website is a vital tool for communicating to all stakeholders both within the school, and to the wider community. It can be used in a variety of ways from a simple information tool, through to an all singing, all dancing spectacular that can publish sports results, host a school magazine or deliver homework projects to your pupils.

Even in its simplest form as a pure information site, it must work hard – because as everyone knows, the web has become the first port of call for any fact-finding mission. This means that any prospective parent and pupil will be typing your school name into Google, and expecting to be wowed when they land on your homepage. Also with any electronic campaign, all roads lead back to Rome – your website, so it has to be well thought out, well designed and from a technical point of view perform well.



# To make the most of your website, here are a few tips:

1. Designate a single person as a web controller – one point of contact who has the last word. Allowing a free-for-all from various parties will only create problems.
2. Ensure that your website has a simple Content Management System (CMS) that allows you update your site easily.
3. If you are creating a new website, be as clear as possible what the site will need to do, what the content will be and how will it need to develop in the future. Any interested parties with a say should be consulted before programming starts! The clearer everybody is at the outset, the easier the project will flow.
4. Work with a company who will work in partnership with you to produce your website – they need to be flexible, jargon free, practical and offer guidance where needed.
5. Don't start designing anything until you have a clear picture of the structure and customer journey through the site. Time spent planning now will save hours in the long run!



## 2. Your blog can show the human face of your school

Blogs can be a wonderful way of showing a different side to your school. The pupils can be involved and by definition it is not the school's 'corporate face'. It should be viewed as the electronic equivalent of the school magazine – it can contain stories and views that wouldn't necessarily be a part of your main site.

It can provide a great platform to share ideas, and blogs are generally viewed with more credibility as a personal view, not just PR. The blog can also let pupils feel that they can have their say and be more involved with the school community.

It is also a great hands-on way of teaching what a blog is, its impact in a wider sense, how you write for an online readership and all the practical skills such as uploading different media and other vital skills for the online age.

One caveat though – obviously it goes without saying, blogs needed to be strictly monitored!



## 3. Email Marketing

The majority of schools, academies and colleges use email for informing pupils, students and parents of everyday activities and events. This generally takes the form of a pure text email and has proven to be very efficient and cost-effective.

This can be expanded further by producing online newsletters which contain text and pictures. This requires a template design that can be used for each addition, and (potentially) a third party supplier to send out the emails.

While using email has overtaken traditional direct mail as the preferred method of communicating to existing and potential customers the principles of marketing should remain unchanged. While it is 'easy' to send out mass communications, everything needs to be on brand and on message.

This form of email can be used very effectively in the education sector. It can be used to market to people outside the school community such as corporates. For example it could work very well for fundraising initiatives, sponsorship or special events that need to be widely publicised in a more professional and impactful way.



## 4. Using social media can be quick & effective

**There are a myriad of social networks out there but we will focus on the four most common.**

### Twitter

Twitter has become increasingly popular particularly over the last year or so. Creating a Twitter account for your school is very simple. To make the most of it, don't restrict access to the account. All you are going to use it for is promotional material and public announcements and the like. Confidential information for parents and staff etc needs to be circulated in the usual manner, i.e., via email or printed documents as necessary.

Twitter messages are limited to 140 characters but you can tweet photos and links to websites to expand their content. What do you send out via Twitter? Anything you want the world outside your community to know. Information like sports scores and events announcements are the type of thing schools using Twitter tweet on a regular basis. Again, your account needs to be strictly controlled, but that isn't difficult.

### Facebook

Many schools have discovered that Facebook can be a powerful tool for reaching both the school and wider community such as ex-pupils. It's a great place to store photo galleries of events, speech days, and all the other exciting, wonderful happenings and news you want your community both at home and abroad to be a part of. Think of it as a network where people can join and contribute – its a simple way for people connected with your school to keep in touch.

### Youtube

Video is a fantastic way to give parents and pupils a unique perspective of your school. The power of peer to peer marketing should not be underestimated, so consider telling the stories of real pupils and key stakeholders to engage all areas of community.

### Pinterest

Pinterest is a social sharing platform that allows users to compile inspirational, creative or interesting content into one place. It can be a fantastic way to showcase the personality of the school and communicate your wider interests outside of the classrooms.

# 5. Online banner advertising

Online banner advertising is probably the most common form of promotion on the internet. It takes the form of banner ads that in the main are animated and are displayed on many consumer websites and e-newsletters.

The format is simple, you see the ad and click on it. It takes you through to a website where you find the information or offer you are looking for. Generally to maximise the impact of the ad, a specifically designed **landing page** containing targeted information will be where the click through takes you to.

Banner ads have had a chequered history in marketing terms over the years. This is mainly due to the incredibly bad design and messaging that some companies used in their ads. It's fair to say though that the biggest brands still use them extensively and consider them a powerful tool to drive potential customers to their sites. This is because they create great ads that follow traditional marketing principles!

Best of all, when combining Google's free analytics and an Adwords campaign, banners can be tracked and re-targeted to people who may have visited your site but not 'acted' with a download request or contact before leaving. Your ads will be displayed on other sites they visit and that way you can remain in front of that prospect even when they have left your website.

There are a myriad of formats and methods of payment that requires another book (coming soon but drop us a line if you need more help here), but banners can work very effectively in the right place, with the right creative execution.



# The last word

Online marketing is constantly subject to a huge amount of hype both in professional circles and in the media. The clamour for using the latest techniques and networks such as Snapchat or Vine have resulted in some rash decisions – **ill judged use of any marketing media will damage your brand, not enhance it.**

The principle is this – electronic marketing is no different to any other media, and you should ask yourself the same questions you ask before you choose any media. Is it right for our market? Does it contain the right messages? Is it well designed? And all the other normal checks and balances we have been using in marketing since the year dot!

Summing up, it is not the silver bullet that can cure all your marketing ills, but it can be a fantastic tool to support all the other good things you do to promote your school, academy or college.

If you would like to find out more about online marketing, just call us for a chat on **0121 772 0800** or email **info@theagencyforeducation.co.uk**





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