

THE SCHOOL CHANNEL: THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD **(AND UNDERUTILIZED)** CHANNEL FOR REACHING FAMILIES

by Ward Eames





SO, WHAT DID YOU LEARN AT SCHOOL TODAY?

This time-honored icebreaker still kicks off countless dinnertime conversations across the country. Between mumbles, eye-rolling and juvenile reluctance, there is actually something very important happening around those tables: people are teaching each other. Is your company a part of this rich and valuable conversation? Would you like to be?

If so, the school channel may be your answer. It provides corporations, non-profits and governmental organizations with a unique access to students and their families. However, the “rules” for the legitimate use of this channel — i.e. to deliver messages that are important to a corporation — are often misunderstood. This white paper will clarify what’s appropriate, and what isn’t, when trying to reach students and families via the school channel.

“Often misunderstood, the school channel is an underutilized marketing communications gateway to families that can be used legitimately and effectively.”

A REAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGEMENT

There are approximately 110,000 schools in the United States. All economic brackets, every ethnicity and every stage of intellectual development is represented within the walls of our public and private schools for about nine months out of every year, totaling some 53 million K-12 students. Unlike media channels such as TV, the Internet, radio or social media, which have an amorphous and inconstant pool of viewers or listeners, the audience of children at school is not only captive but is also receptive.

By engaging this school audience with important messages, the result of your outreach actually redoubles without additional effort. In addition to reaching the staggering number of kids in the classroom, the information you share is also going to reach the many adults involved in the lives of these children, including parents, teachers and school staff or volunteers. These adult family members and school professionals bring approximately 85 million additional people to your potential audience.

Clearly, the school channel offers access to students and adults. However, using this channel effectively and ethically can be a slippery slope. How can your company take advantage of this unique opportunity? ***By sponsoring quality educational programs in schools that legitimately align with your brand, you can have long-term access to engage students and their families with your corporate message.***

DELIVERING A CORPORATE MESSAGE VIA EDUCATION

Kids are in school to learn, and in that environment they are ready to absorb your information and message right alongside their lessons on fractions and physics. By offering information intended to improve the minds, awareness, responsibility and habits of a community, the sponsoring corporation emerges with a positive presence in an aspect of life outside of consumerism. People take notice and they pass that notice along to others. The public is intelligent and discerning, and so are the kids filling today's classrooms. School sponsorship is a true bridge between you and those classrooms.

“Using the school channel appropriately will allow your company to emerge with a positive presence outside the life of consumerism.”

WHAT IS A SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP?

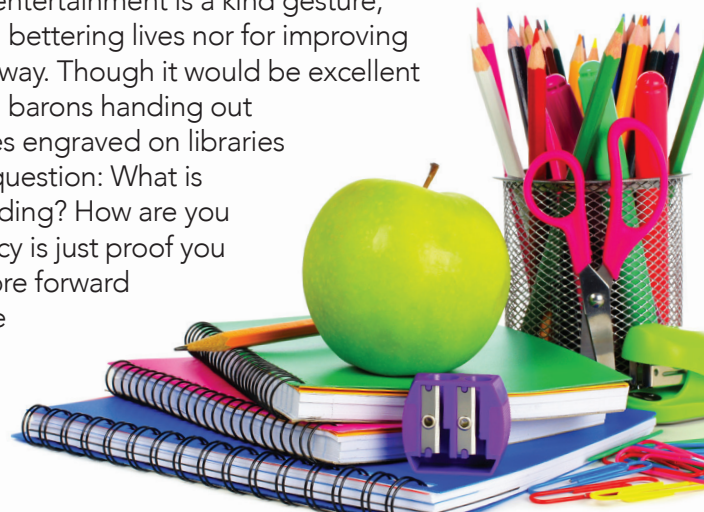
School sponsorship is an educational exchange between you, school children and their families. It is an education-based program that allows your company a healthy and positive presence in schools across a region or the nation. In return, it brings equally healthy and positive benefits for your corporate reputation.

WHAT A SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP IS NOT

School sponsorship is not an advertisement. Perhaps the most obvious tool to create a presence in schools is to purchase a section of the gymnasium wall in hopes that spectators will look up from their nachos at halftime and notice your logo. This effort's primary upside is also its downside in that its great ease also makes it the least proactive method of engagement in the school channel. The company name and logo will be visible, but it will offer no personality, no human interaction and essentially no immediate educational value. There is a huge difference between a classroom and a living room, and blatant advertisements belong solely in the latter.

School sponsorship is also not cause-related marketing. Some companies have chosen a purchasing incentive to fuel their educational contribution. Programs like Box Tops for Education, the method of choice for General Mills and Campbell's Soup Labels for Education are certainly generous programs, but only after a child or an adult involved with the school has spent money on that company's product. The resulting contribution is a percentage of a profit rather than an investment in a client, let alone a direct educational offering. The lack of actual involvement and interaction between the company and school eliminates any sort of emotional investment the students and adults may feel toward a corporation with a more hands-on approach.

Finally, school sponsorship is not philanthropy. Philanthropy is wonderful and admirable, but isn't always a realistic option in our competitive market and challenging economy. Corporate sponsorship of something like a performance that is strictly for entertainment is a kind gesture, but it's neither an investment in bettering lives nor for improving your company in a meaningful way. Though it would be excellent if we were all 19th century steel barons handing out gifts freely just to see our names engraved on libraries across the nation, it raises the question: What is the benefit of a name on a building? How are you affecting the future if your legacy is just proof you existed? The 21st century is more forward thinking than that. This is where school sponsorship steps up to the plate.



FIVE TYPES OF SCHOOL SPONSORSHIPS

Every market and every audience is unique, and since there is not a one-size-fits-all answer to meet every organization's need, there are also a variety of school sponsorship types — five to be exact. These types include Sponsored Curriculum, Volunteers in the School, Extracurricular Activities, Train-the-Trainer and School Events. Using the school channel appropriately will allow your company to emerge with a positive presence outside the life of consumerism. Like all things in this imperfect world, each type of sponsorship comes with advantages and limitations, but the goal is to match a school sponsorship that yields your desired outcome — your ROI — while delivering valuable knowledge to the students. Essentially there should be a win/win situation for you and your audience.

1

SPONSORED CURRICULUM

The most common type of school sponsorship is a Sponsored Curriculum, which is a material educational presence in a classroom as opposed to a personal presence. Newspapers In Education is a program that falls into this category. Through this nationwide program, a sponsor essentially foots the bill for a newspaper subscription that is delivered to a classroom. Included alongside the subscription is an online teacher's guide to help facilitate lessons designed around the current articles. Newspapers In Education can be used as a part of both social studies and language arts, and can be specialized due to its local and topical nature.



“Corporate attraction to schools is nothing new and the reason is very clear: you want to reach a large and important audience.”

Another example of Sponsored Curriculum is The Stock Market Game, provided to schools by groups such as Merrill Lynch, McGraw Hill and even the New York Stock Exchange. The premise is that students are given hypothetical money to invest in actual stocks as they learn to understand how the market works, while refining their math skills and financial literacy.



2

VOLUNTEERS IN THE SCHOOL

Volunteers in the School is a far more interpersonal kind of school sponsorship than the previous. This type of sponsorship places an expert from a field — typically a member of your company — directly into the classroom as a teacher, mentor or guide. The range of topics this sponsorship can cover is as wide and varied as they come, including everything from life skills to specific fact-based programming. Be aware however, that this is a far more expensive program than it might seem on the surface. The word “volunteer” can be a bit misleading, since the individual sent to the school is very likely an employee of your company and is often, in fact, an executive. This volunteer from your company is still on your payroll, so their time away from the office is still on the company clock though the work they would otherwise accomplish onsite is lost.

3

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Sponsoring Extracurricular Activities is another school channel option. Sometimes also called co-curricular activities, these after school programs offer exceptional educational opportunities (although not all students have the time to participate or access to out-of-school activities). Of the available options listed so far, Extracurricular Activities offer the most slender slice of the student population. *FIRST*® *LEGO*® League Jr. is a great illustration of this sponsorship. The *LEGO*® company sponsors an after school club that supplies a team of students with materials (namely those familiar multicolor bricks) and a particular task which requires the students to build a robot in order to be accomplished.



Yet another example of an Extracurricular Activities sponsorship is



the program Destination Imagination. This program teaches teams of students to solve problems that vary from scientific to theatrical through critical thinking, creativity and teamwork. The program is nationwide and also has a presence internationally in 30 countries. The combination of imagination, science and play in both of these sponsorship types is ingenious and builds a strong emotional attachment between participant and sponsor.

4

TRAIN THE TRAINER

The next sponsorship is Train the Trainer, in which educators are brought together in order to learn and become their schools' experts on a subject or theme. These teachers return to their classroom and foster this information among their students. Project Wet is a fitting model for this sponsorship. It is a science-focused program concerned primarily with water. This project is available in all 50 states and is available to grades K-12.



Water Education for Teachers

The Jason Project is another successful model for Train the Trainer. JASON conducts customer teacher training workshops for schools and districts as well as professional development workshops across the country. A corporate sponsorship allows students in a classroom to tackle challenging, standards-based lessons in subjects such as weather, climate change, ecology, geology, energy and more.



5

SCHOOL EVENTS

The final model of school sponsorship is called School Events, which includes programs like Field Trip Factory. This program provides an online curriculum that schools can use as they visit an off-site business, factory or facility. The program is designed for ages K-8, and is available in every U.S. state. Teachers can choose from 30 different field trip curricula. Again, the educational value of such a sponsorship is typically very positive and companies who sponsor such activities build a positive association with their names.



**FIELD TRIP
FACTORY**



One last example for these models is the program Mad Science. The images this program might conjure of wild science experiments are not far off, and it in fact brings exciting and theatrical science to school assemblies or directly into science classrooms. The program belongs to a Canadian company and local franchise operations bring specialized presentations to schools in all 50 states to grades K-12.

DELIVERING A CORPORATE MESSAGE VIA EDUCATION

An investment in young people is at once healthy and valuable. Corporations have famously spent staggering amounts of money on advertising to the youth market. But by exchanging advertising for educational sponsorships, your company has the opportunity to utilize a communication channel with amazing potential.

A legitimate school sponsorship could improve the lives of millions of children while also improving your reputation among millions of adults. When kids are excited about an idea, the family will likely follow suit, whether the subject is as simple as turning off lights when they are not being used or as complicated as giving up smoking.

Today's kids are up to the challenge of shaping today's adults. The challenge for you is to find an opportunity to get them educated and excited, and of course reaching the largest possible audience makes the most sense. And where can you find that audience? In school.

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