



An Institutional Communication Plan for PAREF Southridge School

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Abstract: - *Despite its unique education offers and longevity, PAREF Southridge School still confronts difficulty in attracting enrollees. The school reveals that the enrolment figures have been declining and it has not been meeting its expected numbers. External stakeholders' surveys and social media surveys were utilized to explore the causes of this difficulty. Findings revealed that the school is not well-known among the public compared to other similar top-tier institutions, and stakeholders do not have easy access to adequate information about the school that is relevant to them. In fact, more than half of the participants did not know about the school and were uncertain about its reputation. Meanwhile, among those who answered that they were somewhat or fully familiar with the school, they became aware of its existence mainly because of the word-of-mouth; and associated the school commonly with the terms like "exclusive" and "all-boys." On top of that, the school paints a weak online presence. Hence, this paper outlines the proposed institutional communication plan to mainly raise the visibility of the school, with communication goals such as: (1) creating a school image; (2) developing a culture of communication; and (3) promoting social responsibility and public image. After that, monitoring and evaluation tools shall be used to measure its effectiveness. The plan should be fluid and not be regarded as a final document. If it is determined to be followed, it should be reviewed and adjusted when goals are met, as new communication issues arise.*

Keywords: Communication Plan; Communication Strategies; Educational Institutions; Marketing; School Image

Introduction

PAREF Southridge School, an exclusive school for the boys, is located in Muntinlupa City, Philippines. Founded in 1979, the school offers elementary and secondary education for boys which features values-based formation, fidelity to the Catholic Church doctrines, and home and school collaboration. Also, the school is inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaria Escriva, founder of Opus Dei. Despite its unique education offers and longevity, the school still confronts difficulty in attracting enrollees. The school reveals that the enrollment figures have been declining and it has not been meeting its expected numbers (PAREF Southridge School, 2009). This report poses a huge challenge for the school. Consequently, if the figure continues, this could lead to detrimental consequences for the school. Worst, it can drive to a major setback that may impede the school's operations.

Furthermore, based on the communication audit conducted by the planner, the school's hindrances are: (1) The school is not well-known among the general public compared to other similar top-tier institutions; and (2) stakeholders do not have simple access to adequate information about the school that is relevant to them. It is indispensable therefore to review and improve its communication activities and to formally create a Communication Management Office. Communication is a process of knowledge transfer and shared understanding between senders (Keyton, 2011). When the school effectively transmits information to its stakeholders and they receive the same understanding, communication takes place. When such continually occurs, the school could have a higher chance to thrive, bolster credibility, and improve its stakeholder relationship. The aim, hence, is less ambiguity and misconception regarding its communication; the path must virtually drive toward mutual understanding.

PAREF Southridge School could successfully fulfill the increased requests for information from parents, prospective parents, students, and other stakeholders by prioritizing communication. As a result, communication can assist the school in accomplishing its objectives and executing strategic initiatives. Many challenges inside and beyond schools may be related directly to the success of school contact—whether the information is shared or not, what was conveyed, how it was communicated, and from whom it was communicated (Keyton, 2011). Similarly, the above school issues may be linked back to insufficient communication.



According to institutional theory, many of the school's procedures that are claimed to promote efficacy are simply done out to establish environmental credibility (Scott, 2014). By adhering to the operational norms, standards, and environmental philosophy, the school boosts environmental support and capital flux, increasing its chances of survival (Tubin & Klein, 2007). A school succeeds because everyone believes it is a school; if no one believes it is a school, regardless of its educational or socializing success, it will fail (Suddaby, 2010). It is consequently critical for a school to consider the larger community since if it does not, the school will quickly deteriorate and eventually die. Because the School is part of a wider social system, it cannot behave as an ivory tower and must consider how the environment impacts and is impacted by the school. Managers can further an organization's functioning by integrating stakeholder participation in decisions, according to Deetz (2005). School leaders can fulfill their social accountability by prioritizing communication, which will lead to the advancement of the school's welfare and democracy. To summarize, paying attention to and managing the school's communication has a significant influence on its ecological, sustainable, and performative relationships.

Methodology

The methodology utilized in crafting this institutional communication plan is a communication audit. In organizational communication, a communication audit refers to the process of analysing the communications of an organization with the goal of boosting organizational efficiency (Hogart & Ellis, 2006). The communication audit was divided into two— external stakeholders' survey and a social media survey. Providing a basis for analyzing and improving school communications, this audit offers information on stakeholders' attitudes, beliefs, and other relevant data.

Results and Discussion

External Stakeholders' Survey

The survey was communicated online, from September 24 to 25 of 2018 to 65 participants. The participants were the general public. They were not involved in the operations of the school. Chiefly, they were outside Muntinlupa City. Respondents' locations ranged from, but not limited to, Taguig City, Paranaque City, Quezon City, Cavite, Tarlac, Laguna, and Batangas. Among those surveyed, 46% were men and 54% were women. 38% were students, while 40% were already working. 17% were Muntinlupa residents, whereas 83% resided outside Muntinlupa.

Knowledge. Almost 70% of the participants did not know the school, but there were at least 30% who were somewhat or very familiar. Surprisingly, we are not on their radar; the general public does not know about PAREF Southridge School.

Reputation. The majority of the participants were uncertain about the reputation of the school. This paints a picture of the general public being unknowledgeable of the school's honour and esteem.

Familiarity. Among those who answered that they were somewhat or fully familiar with PAREF Southridge School their awareness of the school's existence was through word-of-mouth. Therefore, person-to-person conversation about the school is the medium where the general public learns about the school.

Association. Among those who answered that they were somewhat or fully familiar with PAREF Southridge School the majority of the participants (70%) stated that they associate the school with all-boys, and exclusive. Meanwhile, 30% said that they associate the school with Catholic education and values. The general public predominantly links the school with its type of schooling.

Social Media Survey

This Social Media Survey was conducted on October 2, 2018. The communication planner visited various social networking platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to collate the number of likes, tweets, followers, subscribers, and other related information. This survey aims to compare the social media statistics of top-tier schools with PAREF Southridge School.



Generally, PAREF Southridge School falls behind on social networking sites in comparison with other top-tier schools. The school has the lowest Facebook page likes; Twitter tweets and followers; and YouTube uploaded videos and channel subscribers. This, in essence, paints an image of the weak online presence of the school.

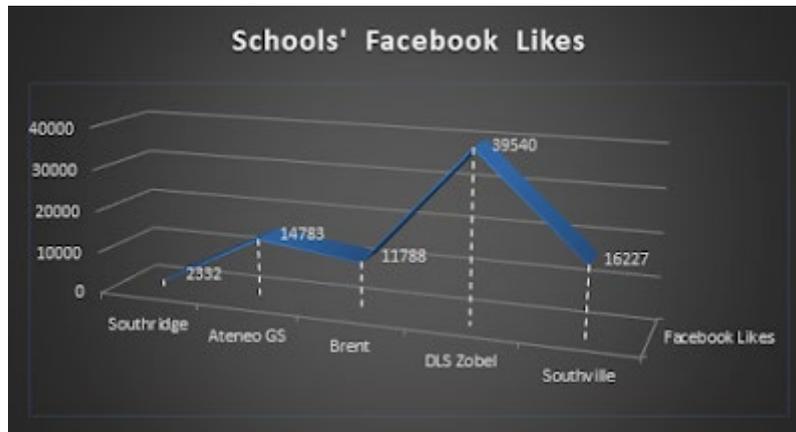


Figure 1. *Schools' Facebook Likes*

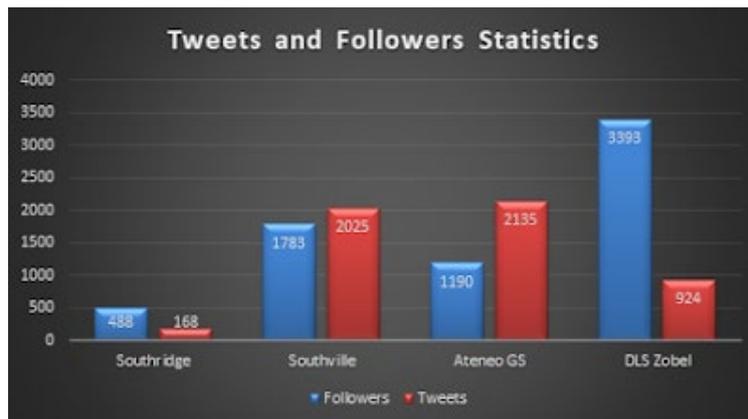


Figure 2. *Schools' Tweets and Followers Statistics*

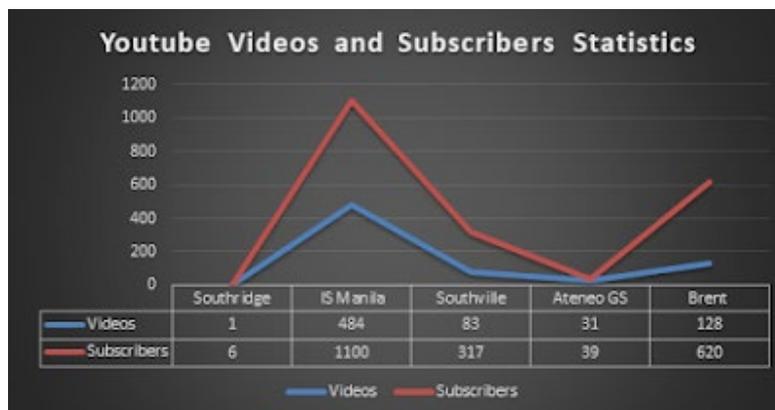


Figure 3. *Schools' YouTube Videos and Subscribers' Statistics*

Communication Goals

Creating a school image. PAREF Southridge School is perceived as an experienced and dynamic school that meets national and international standards.



Developing a culture of communication. PAREF Southridge School speaks with one clear voice to its stakeholders.

Promoting social responsibility and public image. PAREF Southridge School is perceived as an institution that helps to solve environmental and societal issues.

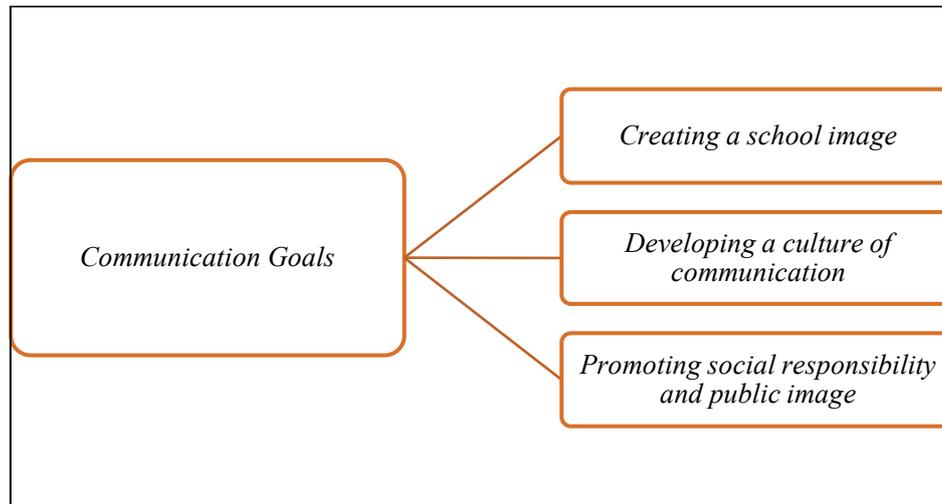


Figure 4. *Communication Goals*

Communication Objectives

Creating a school image. *PAREF Southridge School is perceived as a transparent and credible school that meets national and international standards.*

1. Continue with electronic communication tools to provide information for all stakeholders.

1.1 Contain the school's official website, www.southridge.edu.ph, a clear and comprehensive source of information about the school, and its curricula, policies, events, and operations. Undergo a major site update and redesigning quarterly, considering the search engine optimization, parents' digital dexterity, and convenience in searching information.

1.2 Utilize YouTube, a video-sharing website, to chronicle, disseminate, and archive school information. Use it to live stream events, and to post-school happening ranging from, but not limited to, sports events, faculty development seminars, and mass sponsorship.

1.3 Use Twitter to share short messages. Since it is difficult to share lengthy and complex messages on this platform, use it to share a link to the school's website with detailed information, instead.

1.4 Utilize Facebook, the widely used social networking platform, to share snippets of good news stories, achievements, celebrations, and reminders. Further, a certain post, if shared by many, can lead to being viral.

1.5 Use Instagram, a popular social media platform, to share news and achievements about the school.

1.6 Utilize Pinterest, an explosive social network, to share content in a visual format.

1.7 Use LinkedIn, a professional social networking site, to share information about the school, especially concerning job postings, and successful school performance and achievements.

1.8 Create a blog to share anecdotes and stories of the success of faculty, student, and other staff. Use it also for sharing testimonials.

1.9 Add details about the school's achievements, alumni, and other information on Wikipedia.



1.10 Reply to stakeholders to social networking sites when asked about basic questions for clarification or conveying suggestions. However, complex queries or ideas may be better expressed using email, telephone conversation, or correspondence.

1.11 When the school's website is hacked or updated, causing it to stop working momentarily, the school should maintain a backup website. The URL should be sent to all stakeholders via the Internet.

2. Accredit and affiliate the school to bolster its credibility and validate quality.

2.1 Apply the school to national accrediting agencies such as the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU); Philippine Association of Private Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAPSCU); and Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP).

2.2 Certify the school to international accrediting agencies such as International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

2.3 Certify the student organizations to National Youth Commission (NYC)-Youth Organization Registration Program (YORP).

2.4 Affiliate the school with various academic, sports, religious, and other institutions (local, national and international). This ranges from, but not limited to, Ateneo de Manila University, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the National Museum of Natural History.

2.5 Make the school affiliated through a consortium, collaborative projects, and joint research with other institutions.

Develop a culture of communication. *PAREF Southridge School speaks with one clear voice to its stakeholders.*

1. Establish Communication Management Office (CMO) as the school's communication arm, responsible for communicating the school's vision, objectives, and other content to all stakeholders.

1.1 Staff the CMO to satisfy the demands of the school and stakeholder expectations.

1.2 Work with different offices engaged in communication protocols.

1.3 Formalize policies to aid in the communication of information.

1.4 Post organizational charts to show accountability structure.

2. Establish communication norms and expectations for employees.

2.1 Engage employees in decisions that influence them.

2.2 Give information on issues concerning the school.

2.3 Utilize orientation to underscore the role of personnel.

2.4 Organize with other offices in crafting various plans for the school.

2.5. Articulate a Policy Quality Statement.

3. Upload public school files on the school website for transparency and consumption

4. Share school trivia and topics online (e.g., history, teacher experiences, student life, officer messages, parents' experiences, alumni's gratitude statements, etc.)

Promoting social responsibility and public image. *PAREF Southridge School is perceived as an institution that helps to solve environmental and societal issues.*

1. Provide school representation for community-led meetings such as youth gatherings, professional meetings, business partnerships, and senior citizen groups.

2. Encourage employees (e.g., teachers and staff), principals, and other administrators to become more active in local civic and service organizations.

3. Develop videos and documents of the school regarding its stand or cooperation on global causes: (a) Sustainable Development Goals; (b) 2030: Incheon Declaration; (c) Qingdao Declaration on ICT in education, etc.

4. Develop mini videos in celebration of important events like (a) World Teachers' Day; (b) Christmas Day; (c) Mental Health Awareness Month, etc.

5. Document different activities of Southridge and post them online.



Communication Objectives

The communication strategies will be carried out by use of various communication tools, channels and activities, all further described in this document. The activities include (1) Website updating. (2) Editing of press releases and publication of articles. (3) Organization of and participation at conferences and other events. (4) Liaison with other relevant initiatives. (5) Social media updates and network building. (6) Production of printed and online materials. And (6) Face-to-face meetings

Monitoring and Evaluation

The following resources shall be used to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of this communication plan as follows; (1) Surveys/ Focus Group Interviews. (2) Monitor Community Feedback. (3) Monitor Media Hits. (4) Analytics. And (5) Website Analytics

Conclusion

Communication is permanently present in the context of educational institutions, regardless if it is paid attention to or not. Hence, if a school intends to become successful in terms of dealing with relationships with employees and clients, and the school's reputation, it is fitting that communication is not left to chance—instead, it must be made visible, planned, and internationally articulated. This study postulates that the reason behind the problem of the low number of enrollees at PAREF Southridge School is its lack of attention to organizing and planning communication. Furthermore, additional problems were revealed like low visibility in the world of social media, unfamiliarity with the school, and uncertainty regarding its reputation. Before these matters become distressing to the school, administrators are recommended to discuss interventions and plans to overcome them.

One step to partly solve these problems is to first make a communication plan to tackle them. A communication plan serves as a guiding beacon amid various concerns of the school; it is important so they can document and organize the goals and strategies that can aid in transforming the school's ways of doing things. Without a communication plan, stereotypes can develop, stakeholders are free to make untoward assumptions, and the school may see itself on the brink of decay. Therefore, it is suggested that PAREF Southridge School implement the communication plan crafted here, bearing in mind the following communication goals—(1) creating a school image; (2) developing a culture of communication; and (3) promoting social responsibility and public image. However, a revised or a new one inspired by this study can be made, also. Overall, the appeal of this manuscript is to bring up meaningful conversations that deal with effective planning of communication for the success of the school.

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