



On Call

The new currency: Getting their attention in three seconds

It's no surprise that parents, staff, students — anyone you want to reach — are distracted by too much information, all day, every day. “Getting their attention” is the new currency.

Research from 2013 shows that 90 percent of the world's data was generated in the previous two years ... so you can imagine what's happened since then.

This means short attention spans, which means people take a quick look at your website (or newsletter) and move on, or they ignore posts that don't grab them immediately. Sadly, if you do an internet search on “attention spans,” you'll learn they've shrunk from eight seconds to three.

Your website is still the first stop

Still, for school districts and schools, social media and your website is the still first place “shoppers” like parents go for information. And seniors — the bulk of your voting population — still rely on searching official websites, along with targeted, personal emails from someone they trust from your school or district.

When people want information about you, say for an election, finance measure, boundary debate or to learn more about a rumor, they start online unless they are well-connected. In that case, they text a “what's up” to the insider they trust, which starts a conversation. If you've grabbed their attention with a great post, they'll keep clicking to read more before calling ... the key in our increasingly “impersonal” world because that's how people start their journey to becoming supporters (or detractors!).

Do your messages connect with the right people?

How often have you landed on a website and been confused? You've likely given up and gone to the next search result. *Right?*

Be clear, direct and specific for your audiences ... from their point of view. Hopefully you have “buttons” for each group: “Parent? Click here” or “No kids in school? Click here.” Once you've grabbed attention, get to the point. Appeal to “what's in it for me?” at a glance — in three seconds!

What draws immediate attention?

Use these elements as visuals and messages to grab your audiences:

- Compelling photos of students, including one-minute videos of learning in action you

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For content questions contact: Marcia Latta
Communications Consultant
(503) 580-2612.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at
(800) 562-8927 or
(360) 493-9231.

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Washington State
School Directors'
Association
221 College Street N.E.
Olympia, WA 98516

(Over)

- “refresh” on a school or district’s website often (once a week preferably).
- Student artwork, especially on compelling topics such as suicide, loneliness, substance abuse, graduating, anything that elicits an emotional response, but linking to positive action the school is taking. Or just cute cartoons from kindergartners.
- Leader messages with a headline, not “from the superintendent” and connecting to a quick video. Make them personal ... for a quick “live video” at a special positive event, consider wearing a Go Pro. Provide advance warning to visit a school or classroom. Anyone could do this, including a custodian, office staff, or even a student or parent leader, for a fun twist on “why I love this school”.
- Links to “where your money goes in a nutshell” graphic or message, with contact for more detail.
- If you have the technology to connect with teachers (Class Dojo is a good tool), include that link.
- Ask the School Board link — rather than just list your board members, hopefully you include their emails, or a “Q and A” feature that encourages engagement.

Messaging is a hierarchy of ideas that help people understand why your schools are worth supporting or enrolling in, what you’ll provide, and why you offer the best choice.

Messaging guides the flow of content on your website, integrates into brochures, newsletters, key communicator emails. Jennifer Larsen Morrow of Creative Company, a marketing agency in Oregon offered these tip sheets to dive deeper into this flow:

- Positioning guide and worksheet: <http://bit.ly/2QwmrPK>.
- Messaging overview and worksheet: <http://bit.ly/2Uemsqv>.
- 10 rules for website readability guide: <http://bit.ly/2RzhlQ3>.

Downloads require email sign up.

A final thought

Even in today’s digital communication age, the most important tool to build understanding and support for complex organizations like school districts is the conversations you have with the people sitting next to you. In fact, digital communications (i.e., texting) is making your communication even more personal ... so keep your influencers (key communicators) informed well before they have to text you to learn what’s going on.

Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former Oregon School Boards Communications Director, and Jennifer Larsen Morrow, Creative Company, Inc.