

February 2022

# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## Increasing visibility to improve trust

The essential goal of communicating with your audiences is to build and maintain trust. For schools, this is a high-priority effort — not just fluff — to ensure that schools are trusted, credible caretakers of children’s safety and academic potential, and responsible stewards of taxpayer resources.

Sharing information consistently, transparently and accessibly demonstrates that your district understands this partnership and makes sincere efforts to fulfill these goals.

### Benefits of brand visibility

We all have a personal brand, and all businesses have a professional brand. “Put simply, your “brand” is what your prospect thinks of when he or she hears your brand name. It’s everything the public thinks it knows about your name brand offering — both factual (e.g. It comes in a robin’s-egg-blue box), and emotional (e.g. It’s romantic). Your brand name exists objectively; people can see it. It’s fixed. But your brand exists only in someone’s mind.”

<https://bit.ly/3Huu7J3>

Your brand is not your logo or your name; it is how people think of you when they see your logo or name. The first step, then, is to ensure that they are gaining a positive impression of education in their community. After they feel good about your schools, the next step is for them to share positive word-of-mouth impressions with their own network.

### Building brand visibility

If you have a practice of communicating well, you likely have a strong brand, a combination of reputation, visibility and trust. When people think of your district, the thoughts are generally positive. This is always a good outcome, but it is a necessity when you need something specific from your public, such as approval of a bond measure.

In general, approximately a quarter of taxpayers in your community currently have kids in schools. The number is even lower in some communities. This is helpful to know because the non-parent majority is an important audience with no connection to district operations and no direct familiarity with schools. But they help pay for them.

To help them build familiarity with your schools, you can make visibility a regular, consistent part of your outreach. Make a plan to be seen on social media, school and district websites, print publications, community partner channels, podcasts and in-person events, such as chamber of commerce gatherings, service club meetings and media interviews.

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## Visibility tips

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Building your image, your brand, is not a fast process. Consistency is key. And if a negative event or story damages your image, it can be an even longer process to rebuild and regain trust. Follow these tips to help you earn a positive brand reputation in your community.

**Protect your brand.** Communities have long memories. They will remember if information was not forthcoming or transparent. They will still feel the sting of a closed school building — even decades and many district administrations down the road. Try to imagine and respond to all of these points of view during your decision-making process. Also, be sure to apologize if mistakes were made.

**Define your brand guidelines.** Your communication assets follow style guidelines. Guard them against unauthorized use by staff who may make unauthorized changes in color, typeface, or distorted dimensions. An image that looks familiar but not quite the same can create confusion about the source. If staff may include your logo on materials they produce, be sure they understand the approved specifications — offer to help them with design.

**Share consistently.** An editorial calendar can help ensure that you are posting regularly, which will help people know when to expect information from you. Set up a calendar with key dates and events and define the channels you plan to share to. If you are posting on social media, be sure to respond to comments and questions. This is an important opportunity for two-way communication, also necessary for building trust. If the comments are off-track, disparaging to individuals or profane, be sure to hide and/or report them.

### Opportunities to be seen

**Plan a school tour.** Invite community members into the buildings to see the facilities or special student programs.

**Join local service clubs.** The district should designate representatives who can join service clubs in your community and share updates about educational programs and opportunities. Many towns have groups such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Jaycees and fraternal organizations such as the Elks, Moose and Lions.

**Build a board presence.** Encourage board members to attend a parent meeting, dinner, student performance, open house or athletic event at each school annually. Have them wear their board member name tag.

**Schedule interviews with radio hosts.** Investigate the possibility of getting your board and district staff on local radio programs.

**Broadcast meetings.** Livestream public meetings and publicize them in advance.

**Express gratitude.** Write thank you letters to community members who serve on board advisory committees or speak to the board at a meeting.

**Seek an audience with the editorial board.** If your community has an active editorial board, try to schedule presentations to share updates and news about special programs. Write a guest editorial submission on the board's visions and goals for the editorial page.