

# FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

## WHAT DOES YOUR ADMISSIONS EXPERIENCE LOOK LIKE TO PARENTS?

BY MARK MAYBURY

There's no getting away from the fact that the internet, smartphones and other types of devices are here to stay. In a world that is dominated by social media and 'instant access', meeting the demands of your parents through such routes is paramount. Most will prefer to use these types of technologies to manage their communication with school at every stage of their child's time with you, from the initial enrolment application onwards.

### WHY GOING DIGITAL MATTERS FOR ADMISSIONS

Making the most of this technology throughout your admissions journey is vital. If you're not convinced, then ask the question: in our fast-moving world, how do today's prospective parents want to communicate with us; in person, by post, email, telephone or by using the technology that dominates most of their lives? It's particularly important in international schools where students may be transient expatriates moving from another location to enrol with you and where that initial engagement with parents can be long distance.

We all like the personal touch and it's important that traditional methods are not removed from the process. Technology doesn't replace that, but enhances it, and provides countless benefits for the admissions office, as well as offering an exceptional experience for prospective parents – one that starts with their first touchpoint and can potentially last a lifetime.

Admissions offices that are still 'paper-based' must consider looking at the benefits of going digital. Not only will it save time and money, it ensures that you can interact with parents in new ways - ways in which parents want to be communicated, and helps you improve the ease in which communication can take place. Importantly too, the speed at which you can access tailor-made data and analytics enables you to assess and reassess your strategies and priorities; essential practice for a school in the increasingly competitive international schools market.

### WHAT YOUR ADMISSIONS PROCESS SAYS ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

For all schools, it's important to regularly take an honest look at your admissions process and the experience that prospective parents have. Knowing where your new parents get their first impression of your school matters. Knowing how easy you make it for them to engage with the

admissions office to access the information they require and make their application is essential. Knowing what time of day prospective parents might be going through this process - most likely when the school is closed - is essential for knowing how to engage.

Emily Richards is a schools marketing specialist who advises on admissions and marketing strategies. She says combining technology with personal communication that consistently reflects the school ethos is essential to admissions success today. "Most schools recognise the benefit of marketing the school to potential parents, but there's more to it than that," she explains. "It's important to use the right channels to get your message to the right people, to ensure your timing and frequency of marketing is right so that you don't miss admissions opportunities when parents are preparing to take action. Automated processes not only alleviate admissions work, they can also take much of your messaging responsibility away from individuals and build it into a well-prepared marcomms [marketing and communication] strategy to support every step of the admissions process," she says.

“HOW DO TODAY'S PROSPECTIVE PARENTS WANT TO COMMUNICATE WITH US?”

### SPENDING TIME WHERE IT MATTERS MOST

The admissions office is a very busy place fielding phone calls, emails and post, inputting data, scheduling visits, producing reports - oftentimes unscheduled and requiring immediate action. An effective admissions portal automates, streamlines, tracks and assesses much of this process so that resource can be devoted to the important strategic planning, messaging and meeting of prospective parents.

Emily adds "In an age of instant gratification and big competition, the admissions experience offered by a school can't merely meet expectations; it needs to go above and beyond and do so in the timeliest way. That's where an integrated admissions process can make all the difference," she says. "An integrated process enhances the overall experience for parents because it responds to them when they need it. Every single touchpoint needs to have a wow factor at the moment when the parent is engaged. If one touchpoint is poor or late, you'll more than likely lose that family because of the other school choices accessible to them."



Emily offers other advice for effective admissions:

- Think about your admissions in a very strategic way. Evaluate the messages you are giving out (direct and indirect) at every step of the process.
- Get your vision sorted: a strong, single, straightforward statement that helps parents to know what they can expect from your school, and be sure that everyone within your school knows and can express this vision. Use it in your admissions messaging.
- Focus on no more than three things about your school that sets it apart; the provision that helps parents to see that your school will be a great match for a child. Emphasise how

your school lives and breathes these attributes; highlight them in your marketing content, in your communications and imagery, and point them out during school tours and in parent meetings. All too often, this is not consistent through the admissions process.

- Identify the crucial touchpoints, namely the moments of contact when you could make or break progress with a potential parent, and make sure you respond in the most effective way to maximise admissions progress. If your process is automated, make sure these touchpoints are well branded, carefully personalised, relevant in their messaging and strategically planned.



#### THE AUTHOR

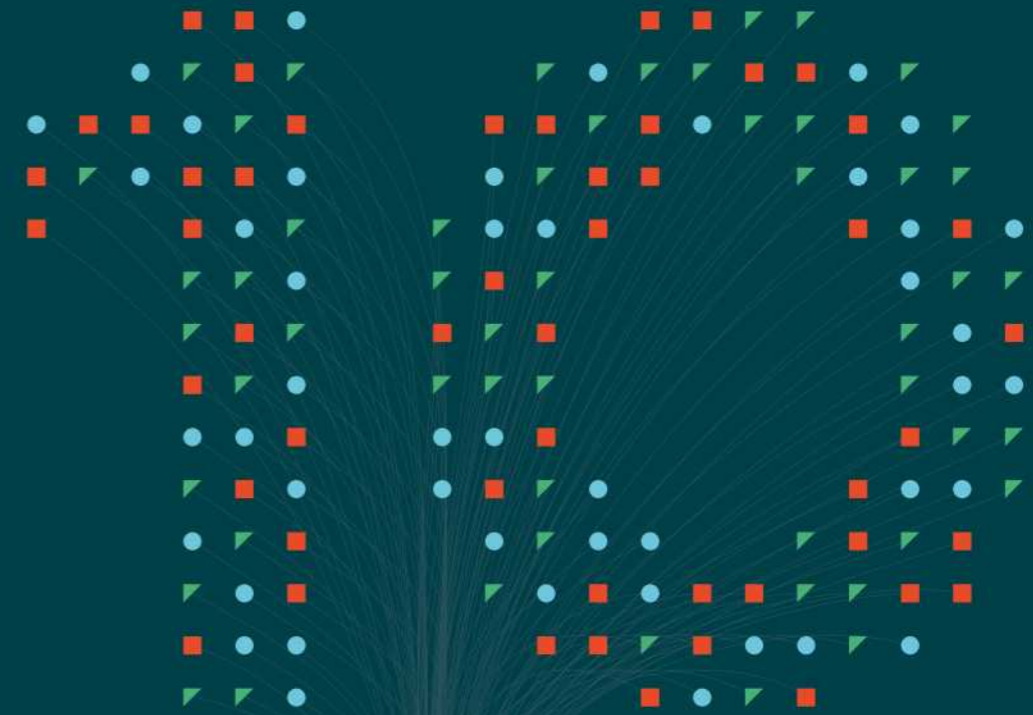
Mark Maybury is Academic Product Manager for [WCBS](#) which supplies information management systems for international schools and has just launched a fully automated and integrated schools admissions system. Emily Richards is Founder of [The Stickman Consultancy](#) which offers education marketing expertise to schools.

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