

SCHOOL PROMOTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

During the June/July school holidays, my wife and I spent 19 days travelling across the United States of America. Driving across the nation, we stopped in to visit a number of schools in Washington DC, Raleigh NC, Charleston SC, and Savannah GA. We also experienced the incredible home of Elvis Presley at Graceland, Memphis TN. My wife had a keen interest in the US school libraries, as she is a teacher herself. I was intrigued by the marketing efforts of these schools and how they promoted and positioned themselves in the very challenging American private school sector (quite possibly the home of marketing and consumerism).

The schools we visited were surprisingly varied in many ways, and the visit has given me a good comparative insight into CCPS's practices; our strengths, areas of opportunity to grow, and ideas to implement for the future.

Ravenscroft, Raleigh NC.

Over 150 years old, formerly known as Anglican Episcopalian, Ravenscroft School in Raleigh NC opened their doors in downtown Raleigh in 1862 during the Civil War. Their symbol is the raven; the school even keeps a few birds in their statuary. The raven is also featured avidly throughout their media publications. In 1992 the school moved to large acreage, nestled between pine forested suburbs, and became non-denominational. Senior Year School Fees at Ravenscroft are \$22,000 (there is no government funding for Independent Schools in the USA).

Ravenscroft seemed to have the most proactive marketing program out of all the schools we visited. Their promotional activities were the responsibility of a non-teacher who formerly worked for an international IT company in communications. Ravenscroft is a co-educational school with over 1,100 students. The school's marketing manager spoke about the benefits of digital marketing; Ravenscroft exclusively use e-marketing and Google AdWords for their promotions, rather than mainstream and traditional media like print, billboards, etc. The only traditional media they do use are some magazine adverts, at the request of parents who wish to see the school showcased across a variety of mediums. Ravenscroft offers an extensive array of smaller brochures for events or for particular programs, including leadership courses.

The Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL), located in Raleigh, is a renowned international organisation who focus on the education and promotion of leadership courses for industry executives. CCL has a partnership agreement with Ravenscroft which includes conducting a leadership program for students within the school. CCPS will be investigating leadership with CCL further.

Prospective parents looking to enrol their children at Ravenscroft receive lots of electronic resources as soon as the school has their email address. The school's website actively promotes Ravenscroft's 'point of difference', persuading prospective parents of 'Why Ravenscroft?' is the best for their children. The school also engage Alumni to keep in touch with younger students, providing information about their time in school, how to gain places and scholarships at USA Colleges, etc.

During my visit, I was provided excellent detailed communications. My wife and I were also taken on a tour through the school's beautiful grounds, including a rose archway covered walkway through which the departing seniors leave the school at graduation.

Other schools visited included:

- Ashley Hall, a small girls' school in Savannah GA
- St Andrew's School, Charleston SC, and
- The Washington Waldorf School, a Steiner School in Washington DC

Ashley Hall, Savannah GA.

All three of these schools were much smaller than Ravenscroft, the largest being Ashley Hall. Established in 1820, the inner-city campus boasted impressive features for their 500 students. At one time, a family pet Grizzly Bear lived on the grounds. Children continue to find fossilised bears' teeth in the gardens of the school after rain. Ashley Hall introduced boys to Years K to 4, to try to increase student numbers. They are the only girls school in South Carolina. Ashley Hall also has international students from Asia and Europe (primarily from Germany) to complement their enrolments.

The Waldorf School, Washington DC.

Located in a leafy and affluent area of Washington DC, The Washington Waldorf School was very different to other we visited. Senior School Fees were \$30,000. Again, no government funding is offered to private schools. However, students at the school had no elective subjects; all students took the same course due to their budget constraints as a smaller school. Classrooms were simple, with single wooden desks and chalkboards, children's artworks in portfolios and on display. The school rents their land and buildings from the local County, increasing their overheads. The Waldorf School's marketing person is a former teacher. He stated a few times that they rely on the power of word-of-mouth and community endorsement thanks to 'mummy influencers' for their promotions. They also utilise a number of digital tactics, including Google AdWords.

Elvis Presley and Graceland, Memphis TS.

Graceland in Memphis is extraordinary! As a home, Elvis' house is on 14 acres in an outlying suburb of Memphis (similar in size to that of Pelican Waters). The estate itself is similar to a time capsule of eclectic seventies décor, with opulence, featuring an unbelievable array of Elvis authentic memorabilia. Themed merchandise is also available at Graceland. The scale of this commercial operation has to be seen to be believed. The house itself and its furnishings are testimony to the family values that supported Elvis, the American Cultural Star.

School Promotions and Development

My time in the United States of America was certainly insightful. Perhaps the main themes to emerge for CCPS from these school visits, are:

- Direct and automated communications from the collection of prospective parents' email addresses is the way forward for school communications. The communications professional from Ravenscroft School certainly favours this method!
- A combination of methods is used to keep current parents happy with their school's public profile, compared to competing schools, but not because any measurable results or student enrolment will follow from mainstream media and printed material.
- The Centre for Creative Leadership, based in Raleigh NC, may bring an outstanding leadership program for CCPS students. Their internationally recognised and historic institution and program offerings will be looked into further.
- Word-of-mouth remains an important area of promotions for schools in a close environment.

- International students are seen as a valuable complement to school enrolments.
- School merchandise could be another valuable source of promotions and revenue as our school community continues to grow.
- Schools commonly have a former or current teacher producing promotional material; however, the best work achieved in this domain is by a non-teacher, a marketing and media communications professional by background.

In conclusion, CCPS and other Australian schools are promoting and marketing ourselves well, in comparison to those schools in the United States. Ravenscroft is an outstanding example of a very impressive campus, educational foundation, and proactive approach to promotions. CCPS shares much in common with Ravenscroft, but they have 140 more years of history behind them in North Carolina, compared to our fast moving eleven years in Pelican Waters. Excellence. Integrity. Learning. It is through our school motto that CCPS will continue to grow and do great things to progress into the future.

Dr Dirk Wellham
Principal