Turning Things Around: Repositioning for Success

Scott Upton

Vice-Principal, Sandwell College

CentralCampus
Sandwell College

What the College faced....

- Eight FE competitors within 8 miles
- c.60 school sixth forms
- History of contraction, financial crisis, slated *regularly* by Ofsted
- Exceptionally poor building stock on all three campuses (some dating back to 1900)
- Low attainment and aspirations of constituency

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Headlines....

FRAUD ROW COLLEGE TO AXE 100

CRISIS COLLEGE WRITES OFF £2M LOSS

‘EDUCATIONAL LIQUIDATORS' ARE RUINING COLLEGE

UNION SLAMS COLLEGE IN RACE ROW

COLLEGE MUST IMPROVE OR IT FACES CLOSURE

CLASSROOM IS LIKE ‘A VICTORIAN TOILET’

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Let’s spin our way out of it....

- “You can put lipstick on a pig. It’s still a pig.” Barack Obama (2008)
- In the modern media age you cannot hide behind spin
- Reputation turnaround is a change programme not marketing
- No-one is interested in good news when there is bad news out there

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Change programme

- Concerted launch and an internal brand
- Improve service to improve reputation
- Raise the reputation of the college with your own staff and they will raise it with the community
- Keep the press close and update them regularly on how things are improving

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Reputation management

- Hierarchy of messages
- Small number of key messages
- Primary message in all communications
- All messages linked to quality and outcomes
- Secondary messages matched with different audiences, but...
- One over-riding purpose per communication
- Repetition, repetition, repetition

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Profile raising and geographic expansion

- Professional marketing and PR staff
- Multiple channels to increase recognition
- Postcode analysis of market penetration
- Targeting of spend on low penetration, easy travel postcodes
- Travel to learn offer
- Use of social media (but no gimmicks)
- Must target influencers too

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Battlegrounds

- Clear selling points
- College v college
- College v school
- College v university
- College (Apprenticeships) v job
- Simple, factual, focussed on outcomes

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What can be achieved

- Open events attendance up 300% over 2 years
- 16-18 applications doubled over 2 years
- 16-18 enrolments up 55% over 2 years
- New ‘high-end’ sixth form launched September 2012 – 1,080 applications for 200 places
- 16-18 applications for 2013-14 up 28%
- Adults up by 46%

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Headlines can change....

RUSH FOR COLLEGE PLACES	APPLICATIONS FOR PLACES AT COLLEGE SOAR
COLLEGE GIVES BOOST TO SHOPPING CENTRE	WAVE OF SUPPORT FOR LANDMARK BIG DIPPER
QUESTION TIME IS HELD AT COLLEGE	SIXTH FORM HAILED A MASSIVE SUCCESS

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