

E-BOOK

The Ultimate Website Optimization Guide For Independent Schools

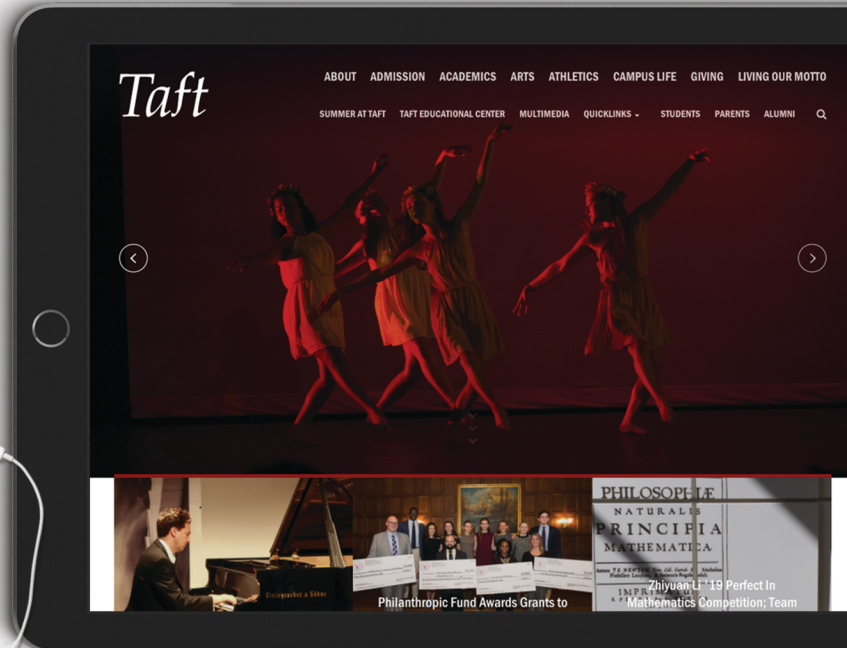


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Introduction: The Importance of Website Optimization

Your school's website is your most valuable marketing asset. Whether you work at an elite boarding school in Hawaii, an all-boys school with athletics at your core, or a small Catholic school on the outskirts of Boston, your website is the first place prospective families go when they want to learn more about your school.

Well, at least it should be — since a good website, especially when coupled with good internet marketing strategies — can easily make the difference in terms of adding students to enrollment. Despite a website's importance, it doesn't *always* get the attention or budget it deserves. Understaffed marketing teams and competing budget priorities make it difficult for school professionals to optimize their website for admissions, advancement, marketing, summer program enrollment, etc.

Website optimization, above all else, is the key to successfully growing your brand, while increasing inquiries, applications, yield, and donations. **Website optimization** is the use of web design, content and search engine marketing strategies to increase the number of conversions happening on your school's website. In this case, **conversions** is best defined by an action taken on your website, including: inquiries, applications, open house RSVPs, donations, etc.

In this e-Book, you will be introduced to numerous tried-and-true methods, strategies, and best practices for optimizing your website's content, design and landing pages for optimal engagement.

Part One

Homepage Optimization

Your homepage often provides the very first impression of your brand, personality, and value.

Elements of a Top-Performing Homepage

A RESPONSIVE INTERFACE

Most schools see 50% of traffic or more from mobile devices, meaning a responsive design that works seamlessly is now a standard and requirement.

A SIMPLE NAVIGATION

Your site's navigation is never a place to get creative. Focus on keeping your main navigation to 5-8 primary sections. You can create a utility navigation to provide quick-access to important pages for alumni, parents and current students.

A VALUE PROPOSITION

Your homepage is not complete without a value proposition — a strategically crafted statement about what is unique about your school.

MULTI-MEDIA

Photos and videos are an essential piece of digital storytelling. Use edge-to-edge photography and embedded videos to set yourself apart.

CALLS-TO-ACTION

Today's websites are all about creating a journey — be sure your school's website offers at least three different calls to action on the homepage to help guide different audiences down separate paths.

AUTO-CURATED STREAM OF RECENT CONTENT

Bringing in news, social media posts, calendars, and blogs directly onto your homepage is a great way to curate content to ensure your homepage automatically looks fresh, while appealing to all audiences.

The Five Question Rule

Seven seconds. That's all it takes for a website visitor to decide whether they are going to stay on your site or leave your school's website. The combination of extremely high expectations and low patience can be a pretty lethal combination for a poorly executed homepage for **two main reasons:**

83% of online searches begin with an unbranded term — such as “best all-boys school in Maryland,” or “private schools in Baltimore” — rather than your school's specific name. So, the large bulk of your school's website traffic is coming from prospective families who may have never heard of your school, or considered your school as an option. ([Source](#))

94% of first impressions are design-related — meaning in just about seven seconds, your prospect has an idea of whether or not they want to learn more about your school based on how your website looks. ([Source](#))

To summarize: You need to immediately capture the attention of your website user with an awesome design, and let them know that they're in the right place in just a few seconds. Otherwise, they'll head back to their search results to find something else.

SOME COMMON HOMEPAGE DETERRENTS INCLUDE:

- Confusing navigation
- Unattractive design
- Too much content
- Outdated content
- Overwhelming graphics
- Slow load times
- Nothing that is special
- Content that doesn't match what they expected to find

A good homepage answers the following five questions by combining the qualities of modern design and logical user experience.

1. What Do You Do?

Your homepage should make the geographic area and group of students served, obvious. Nothing is more frustrating to a prospective student than doing a Google Search for “best private schools in Colorado,” and then landing on a website where he or she can’t tell if they’ve really found what they are looking for.

One of the best ways to incorporate what you do on your homepage is by simply stating it in plain text somewhere near your logo or in the footer.

For example, having statements like: “A Small, All-Girls School Located on the Coast of Maine,” or “The Top Private School for Boys,” will improve your school’s performance in search, and reassure them that they are in the right place.



HERE'S AN EASY TEMPLATE TO FOLLOW FOR YOUR HOMEPAGE:

A **[TYPE OF SCHOOL]** located in **[MAJOR CITY/STATE]** that **[SERVES/SPECIALIZES IN THIS TYPE OF STUDENT.]**

2. What Makes You Unique?

In other words, why should I attend your school? Competition is tough, and there are hundreds of schools just like yours in the country — so you need to be able to effectively communicate what sets you apart.

Infographics are one of the most effective ways to share what sets you apart because of the brain's preference of images over text.

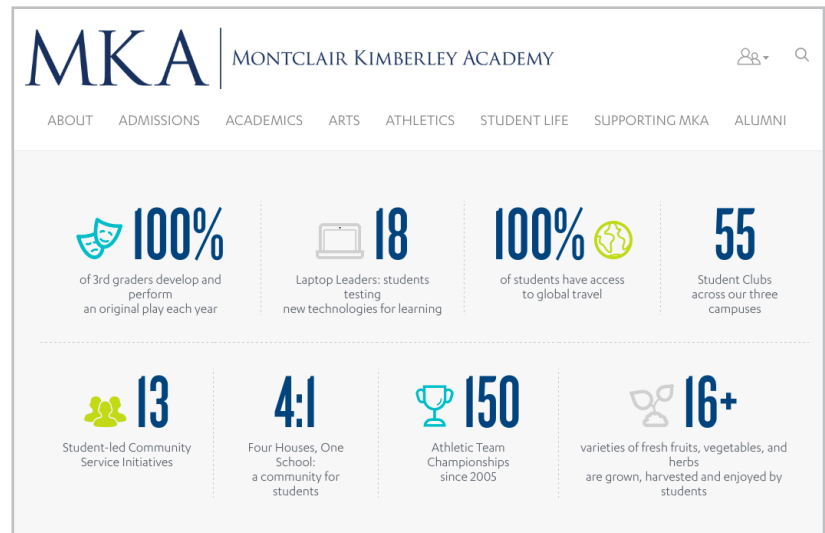
Because 90% of the information transmitted to the brain are visual, visuals are processed 60,000 times faster than text — meaning the majority of website visitors will respond better to visual information than text.

[\(Source\)](#)

Infographics provide schools with the perfect design enhancement to share information in a way that is both easy to process and retain.

In addition to infographics, photos that show your idyllic campus location, one-of-a-kind programs, and championship-winning sports teams are key to a successful first impression.

Never let the first image in your homepage slider seem like it was pulled from Shutterstock or another stock image website.



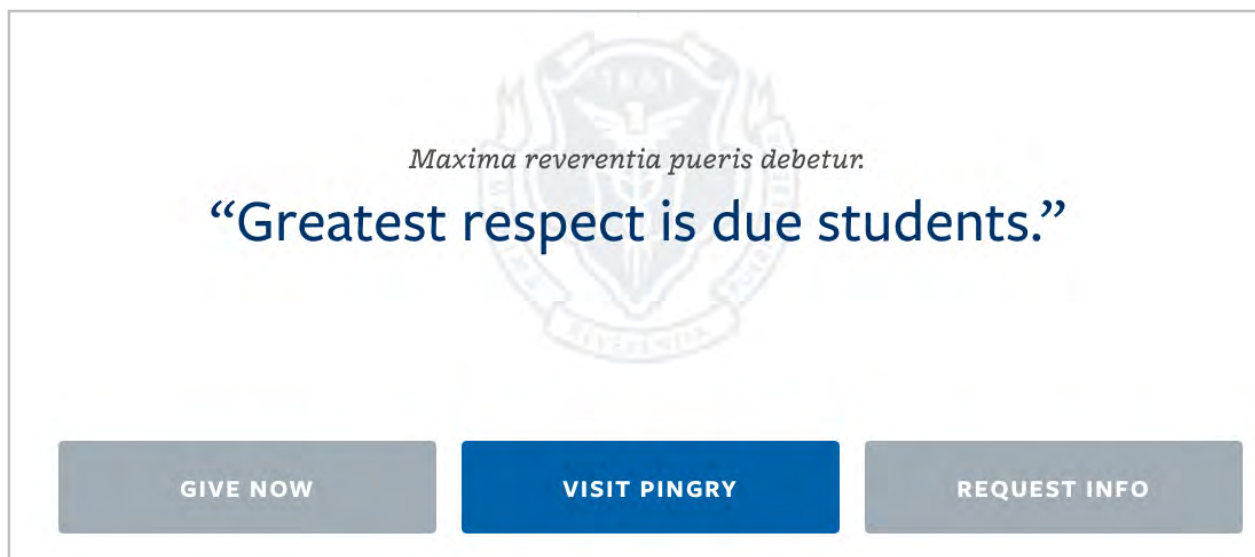
3. How Can I Learn More?

An “Apply Now,” button, or a “Request More Information” dropdown is a must-have element of a successful homepage. Your website’s goal should be to convert website visitors into leads, and the most effective way of doing so is by providing a simple call-to-action button that fulfills their needs (and yours).

On your homepage, have a call-to-action that appeals to each website visitor at their stage in the applicant journey. Only having an “Apply Now” button on your homepage could cost you some traffic to key landing pages that sell the value of your programs.

AN EFFECTIVE CTA COMBINATION FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS USUALLY INCLUDES:

- Inquire Now / Request Information
- Learn More About Tuition and Fees
- Explore Programs
- Start the Journey (or something similar)



4. Where Can I Find You?

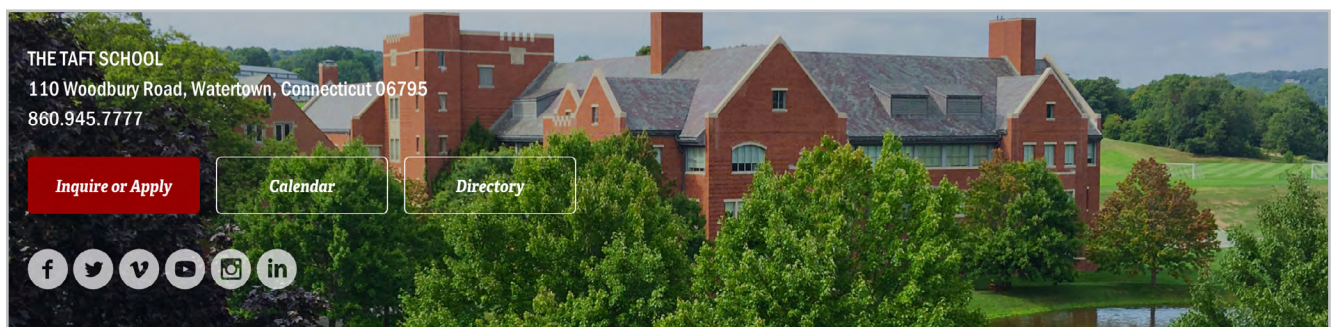
Believe it or not, we've seen plenty of school websites where we had to do quite a bit of digging to find contact and location information — and it's no fun. Contact information should be available on your homepage so that your site visitors know exactly when and where they can find you.

It's important that this information is in plain text for search engine optimization purposes and mobile user friendliness.



Remember: contact information is no longer just your street address. Site visitors want to be able to find you on social media, so your footer is an ideal location to include where visitors can find you geographically and socially.

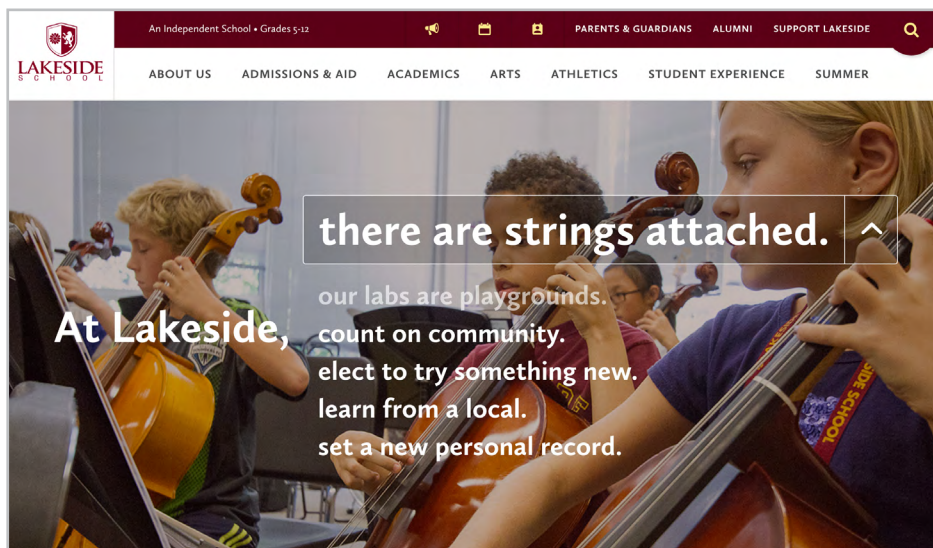
If visitors want to know where to find you, they're typically looking because they want to pay your campus a visit. Make sure an open house schedule is easy to find on your homepage — especially during recruiting season. A "Visit" or "Open House" CTA is a great addition to the homepage.



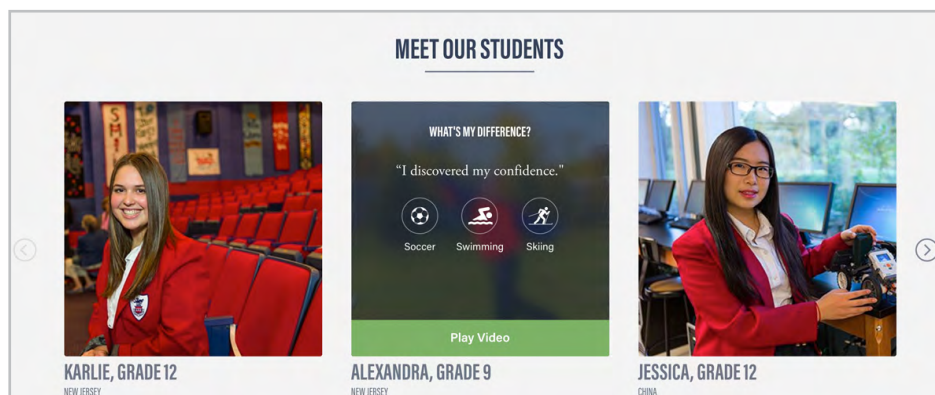
5. Will I Fit In?

When a prospect visits your homepage, it's kind of like a first date. They're not sure what to expect, what to do, or what they're even looking for. So, make them feel comfortable right away — otherwise you'll send them looking elsewhere.

The best way to make students know they'll fit in is to feature photos and videos of students that have already found a way to fit in. For example, on Lakeside School's homepage, they have an interactive section that allows users to explore different aspects of life on campus. Depending on the item selected, different photos appear and related content pops out from the side — all without leaving their homepage.



While photos are great visual stories, it can be hard to beat a great piece of text content that comes from the heart of a student. Testimonials are relatable, and provoke the kind of emotion that answers this question with a resounding “yes!”



Avoiding General Phrases on Your Homepage

When parents are searching for a school, they're looking for the best place to invest in their child's future: education. They're also looking for the best return on investment for their money. **Think about your school's value proposition.** If every other school can easily use the exact same words or terms you're using — like "close-knit community" — how is that going to set you apart?

After the evaluation of numerous independent school homepages, we determined 10 general words and phrases that appear a little too often. If you're using any of these ten words on your school's website, consider what you can do to make these kind of phrases specific to your school.

THINK OF EACH WORD THIS WAY: SHOW, DON'T TELL.

1. *Tight-Knit Community*
2. *Hands-On Learning*
3. *Academic Excellence*
4. *Athletic Excellence*
5. *Personalized Experience*
6. *Unique*
7. *Beautiful Campus*
8. *Diverse*
9. *Innovative*
10. *Nurturing*

1. TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITY

Why you shouldn't use it: Even the biggest independent schools boast a close-knit community between faculty and students, athletes and academic all-stars, seniors and freshmen.

What you could say instead:

Consider the most unique aspect of your close-knit community. Is it your faculty-to-student ratio? Is it your faculty-to-student ratio? Is it the fact that all students must participate in arts and athletics beyond academics? Is it an annual event that brings students together as one?



One great example comes from Hotchkiss School, whose “A Commitment to Each Other” statement makes a powerful impact about how the small community makes an impact on long-lasting relationships.

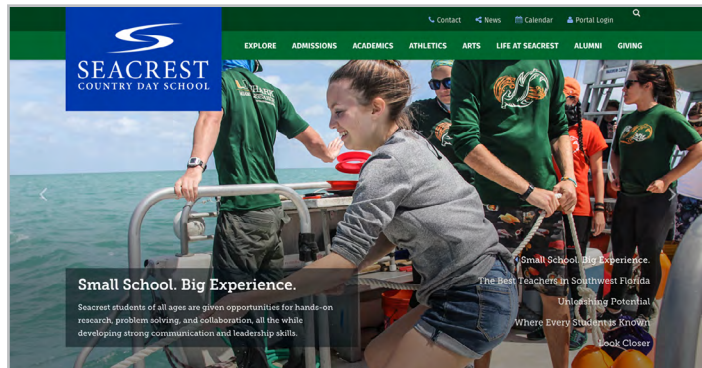
2. HANDS-ON LEARNING

Why you shouldn't use it:

Hands-on learning is no longer a differentiator, but a standard.

What you could say instead:

What kind of experiences do you offer that are hands-on? This example from Seacrest Country Day in Florida is the antithesis of the standard connotation of “hands-on learning.” The active, eye-catching photo exemplifies an experience that is clearly unique to the school.

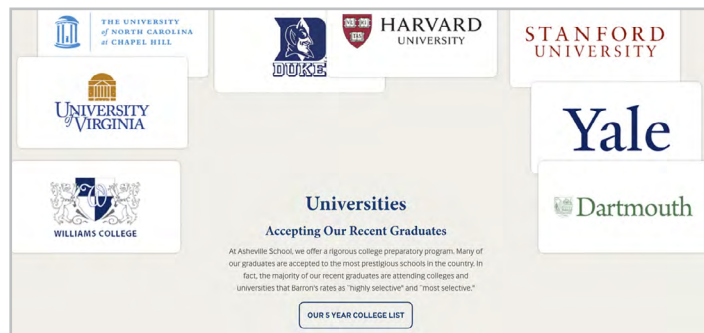
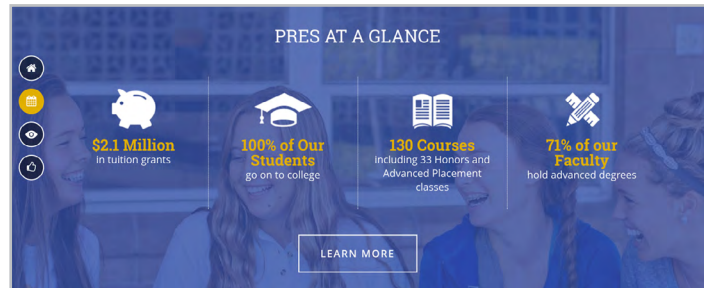


3. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Why you shouldn't use it: Academic excellence and rigor are buzzwords in the realm of independent school marketing. Let's be real: families won't invest in an education that's anything short of excellent or rigorous.

What you could say instead:

In most cases, parents and prospective families care most about how your academics help students evolve. One of the best ways to do this is with indisputable, hard facts and success rates. Infographics, like this one from Presentation High School's homepage, addresses important stats prospective families care about. A college matriculation slider or graphic is an easy way to prove the outcome of your school's academics.



4. OUTSTANDING STUDENT / FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

Why you shouldn't use it: Because really: what is an education without student and faculty relationships?

What you could say instead:

Focus on getting quotes that talk about the way student and faculty relationships change and shape the experience at your school. Because relationships are about people, words crafted by your marketing team just won't have the same impact as something real and authentic — like this series of quotes on Landon School's homepage.

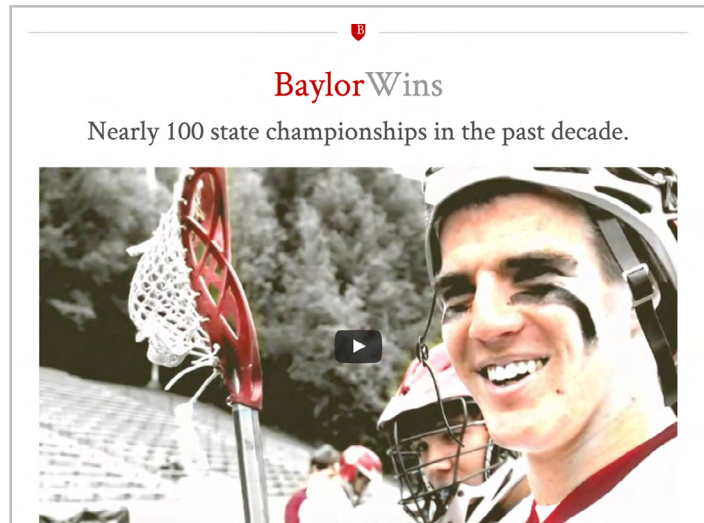


5. ATHLETIC EXCELLENCE

Why you shouldn't use it:

Prospects who are looking to join a stellar athletics program may have already been recruited to your school, or are looking for proof that they're joining a winning team.

What you could say instead: It's okay to boast. We give big kudos to Baylor School, who tells it like it is.



6. UNIQUE

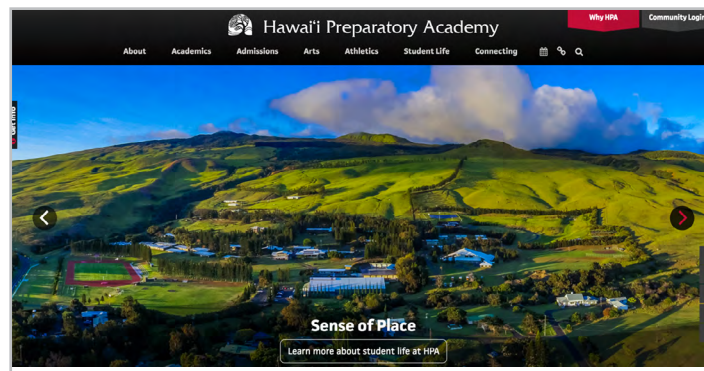
Why you shouldn't use it: Using the word "unique" is a great way to say that you're not unique. Every school is unique in its own way. Using a word like this on your site is a great way to bore a website visitor really fast.

What you could say instead:

Think about the one special tradition your school has that no other one does, or something that can be said about your school that no one else can claim. Focus on your history, location, faculty, and offerings. For example, TASIS Switzerland focuses on how their school "pioneered" academic travel. If their target market is students who want to travel and learn, they've hit the nail on the head.



Hawai'i Preparatory Academy is the epitome of avoiding the cliché, and focusing on what makes their campus and academics special to them. Scope out their entire site, and you'll never find a word like "unique," but rather hundreds of photos and videos that let the user find out for themselves.



7. BEAUTIFUL CAMPUS

Why you shouldn't use it: Isn't every other school boasting about their beautiful campus? Whether it's by the beach, nestled in the hills of California or tucked in between city skyscrapers, every school's campus is special and beautiful in its own way.

What you could say instead:

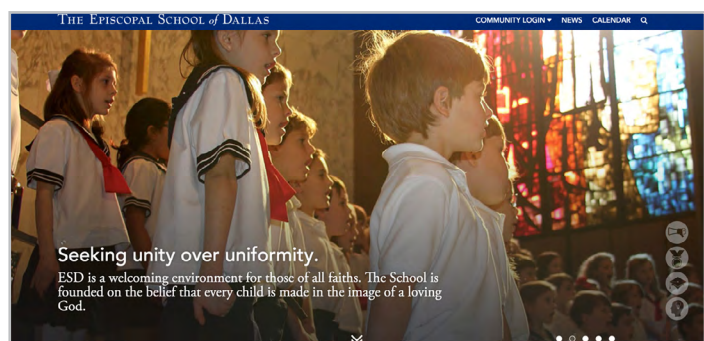
Anytime you have the opportunity to turn a noun like "beautiful campus" into a sentence that includes a verb like "exploring," you've immediately improved your marketing. Add in some photos of students being a part of that campus? You win.



8. DIVERSE

Why you shouldn't use it: It's boring and meaningless unless supported by statistics or graphics. Plus, so much can be diverse — your students, your faculty, your programs. What is diverse? Why? And what is the value it offers?

What you could say instead: Rather than saying your school community is diverse, prove it. The Episcopal School of Dallas addresses diversity head on with the slogan "Unity, not Uniformity," making it easy to infer that even if you're different, you are part of the community. Infographics, videos, and photo slideshows are also excellent ways to showcase the diversity of your campus community, opportunities and traditions.

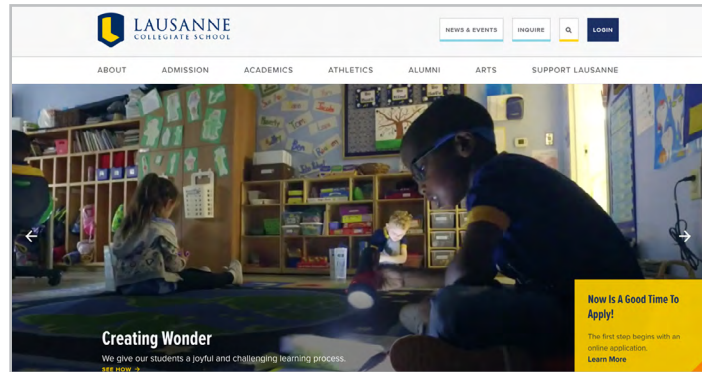


9. INNOVATIVE

Why you shouldn't use it: *You think your academics are innovative, but compared to whom? A term like "innovative" is completely subjective, and should be saved for truly forward-thinking acts.*

What you could say instead:

Consider what sets you apart and which programs do you offer that are the first of its kind. Not every school has an innovative program, but they do offer a unique learning experience. For example, Lausanne highlights their "joyful and challenging" learning process that "creates wonder." While they don't boast their learning experience as innovative, the term "creating wonder" supports the notion that their learning is joyful and challenging — an ideal combination, especially in a lower school.

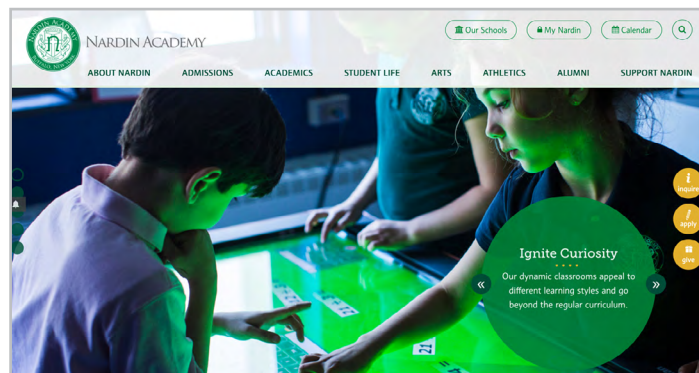


10. NURTURING

Why you shouldn't use it: The point of an education is to nurture. Think about how you nurture students to thrive; rather than the act itself.

What you could say instead:

Consider your advisor/advisee relationships; a series of classes that are available at your school; your faculty to student ratio; and all other pieces of the equation of student development. Most importantly it should answer the question: what is the outcome of the nurturing programs at your school? Nardin Academy's "Ignite Curiosity" slogan hints that their learning environment inspires new ideas, thoughts, and desires.



The Importance of Site Speed

Today's users are impatient, and are mostly visiting from mobile devices, meaning page load speed affects your school website's traffic pretty significantly. In general page abandonment increases as load time increases. As a matter of fact, about 40% of website visitors will abandon a page if it takes more than three seconds. Therefore, on your homepage, and every page on your website for that matter, it is essential to size all images and video for the web. ([Source](#)) **The most common cause for slow load times is large photos and videos embedded or used on your homepage (and throughout pages on your site).**

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS FOR ENSURING YOUR IMAGES AND VIDEOS ARE OPTIMIZED FOR THE WEB:

Export images at the size they will be displayed on your website. Focus on image size and getting your dimensions right. Uploading a 7000 pixel-wide photo for a 200 pixel-wide thumbnail isn't necessary, and bogs down site speed. While many CMS platforms allow for inline resizing, keep in mind that this might not actually be resizing the photo, but simply scaling it to fit a certain area.

While it is an extra step to resize images imported from cameras, creating templates that already have the sizes for each area on the site helps save time. That way, the settings are already there, and you simply have to drag, drop, and save! *Compressor.io* is a great tool to use to compress images once they are resized.

Be sure all images for web are 72 dpi. While in print having 300 dpi improves the quality of images, this will not make a difference on the web.

Find an image optimizer tool that doesn't hurt the quality of your images. *ImageOptim* is a free tool that shrinks down image size without harming image quality. However, it is only available on Mac. The tool *TinyPNG* also optimizes PNG images when they are absolutely necessary. Just drag and drop the image into the site, and they'll reduce the size by half or more.

Be sure all photographs on your site are a JPEG. Only use PNG files when uploading a graphic. Since they are higher quality, they'll bog down site time if you end up using a PNG file for photographs.

Part Two

Landing Page Optimization

Landing pages are, in some cases, more important than your homepage. They are the pages that often provoke a conversion for your open house, donations, admissions inquiry, and campus visits.

Landing Pages: Defined

Imagine this situation: A parent heard about your school through word-of-mouth as a friend was raving about how the new STEM program helped her daughter get a full-ride scholarship to her top choice college. Intrigued, the parent goes home and Googles your school's STEM program to learn more about what you have to offer. However, she never fills out a form because your landing page failed to meet the expectations she had after the conversation with her friend.

This situation is all too common for all educational institutions. **Branded searches — a search query that includes your school name + keyword** — drive a ton of website traffic to landing and interior pages. (Don't worry, we'll cover this in more detail in the next section.) Despite this, schools often compromise their landing and interior page design to spend all their time, energy and budget on their homepage.

BRANDED SEARCH:
A search query that includes your school name + keyword

HOWEVER, LANDING PAGES ARE EQUALLY AS IMPORTANT AS THE HOMEPAGE.

The term “landing page” can be confusing. From an analytics perspective, it's the page someone lands on to begin their visit to your site. Most designers will refer to a “landing page” as the page in-between your homepage and interior pages — AKA your main navigation items: Admissions, Athletics, Alumni, etc.

For marketers, the term “landing page” is used to describe a page that is *specifically* designed to drive conversions (AKA, inquiries, applications, open house replies, etc). These landing pages are different, as they remove the main navigation to keep visitors from leaving the page and always have a form with a call-to-action.

In this section, we're going to cover how to optimize both types of landing pages. First, we will cover how to optimize from a design perspective, then from a conversion perspective.

Landing Pages: Top Tier Navigation Best Practices

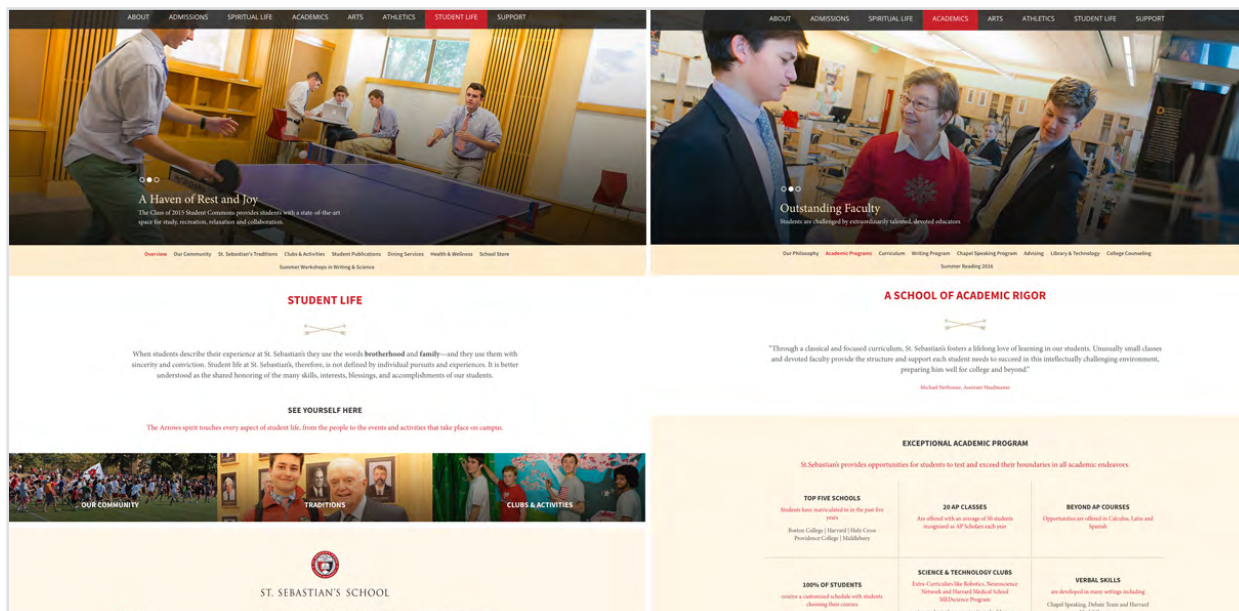
Let's begin by discussing the three most important qualities that the top tier navigation pages (such as Admissions, Academics, etc) should follow.

1. Create a consistent, predictable design.

Maintaining consistency among the look and feel of these pages is integral to your site architecture because it simplifies the user experience. You wouldn't want the look, feel, and navigation of your Student Life page to be completely different than your Admissions page. Rather than approaching each page as a blank slate, it's important to ask: how can we leverage our content best as a part of this design?

THE IDEAL LANDING PAGE STRUCTURE INCLUDES:

- Quick navigation to interior pages of that section
- A hero image slideshow
- A brief description
- An infographic or testimonial — something “extra” to engage the visitor
- Calls-to-action
- A simple, consistent footer



Notice the similarities and differences between these two landing pages on St. Sebastian's School's website. While the design is similar and predictable, the content and calls-to-action change to correspond to the related topic. This ensures a positive user experience because it makes information easy to find — including how to make that next step.

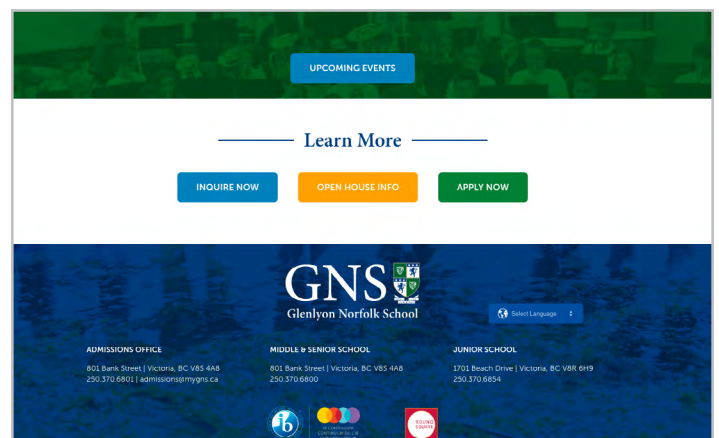
2. There should always be a clearly defined “next step.” When someone lands on any page on your school’s website, they expect to find calls-to-action that make their next step as easy as their first. Use clearly defined calls-to-action that direct to other lower-level interior pages to guide users down a path of conversion.

A FEW IMPORTANT CTA QUALITIES TO CONSIDER:

Calls-to-action are most effective when placed in the top-left hand corner of the page or at the bottom: Generally speaking, people read websites in an “F” shape from the upper left to the lower right of a page. ([Source](#))



Based on this research, best practices suggest that CTA buttons on the top left and bottom right get the most clicks. Use contrasting colors to visually separate different calls-to-action. For example, if you’d like to offer three different calls-to-action, ensure they are three different colors, and also stand out from the other colors on your page.



HIGH COMMITMENT AND LOW COMMITMENT VISITORS

In general, you have two types of individuals visiting your website — high commitment and low commitment. High commitment visitors are ready to fill out a lengthy form, while low commitment visitors are just browsing, and will only commit to a form if they feel ready. Each page should have 2-3 calls-to-action that appeal to different website visitors. For example, while someone may be visiting your Admissions page, they might not be ready to apply. So offer other options, such as Download a Viewbook or Schedule a Visit.

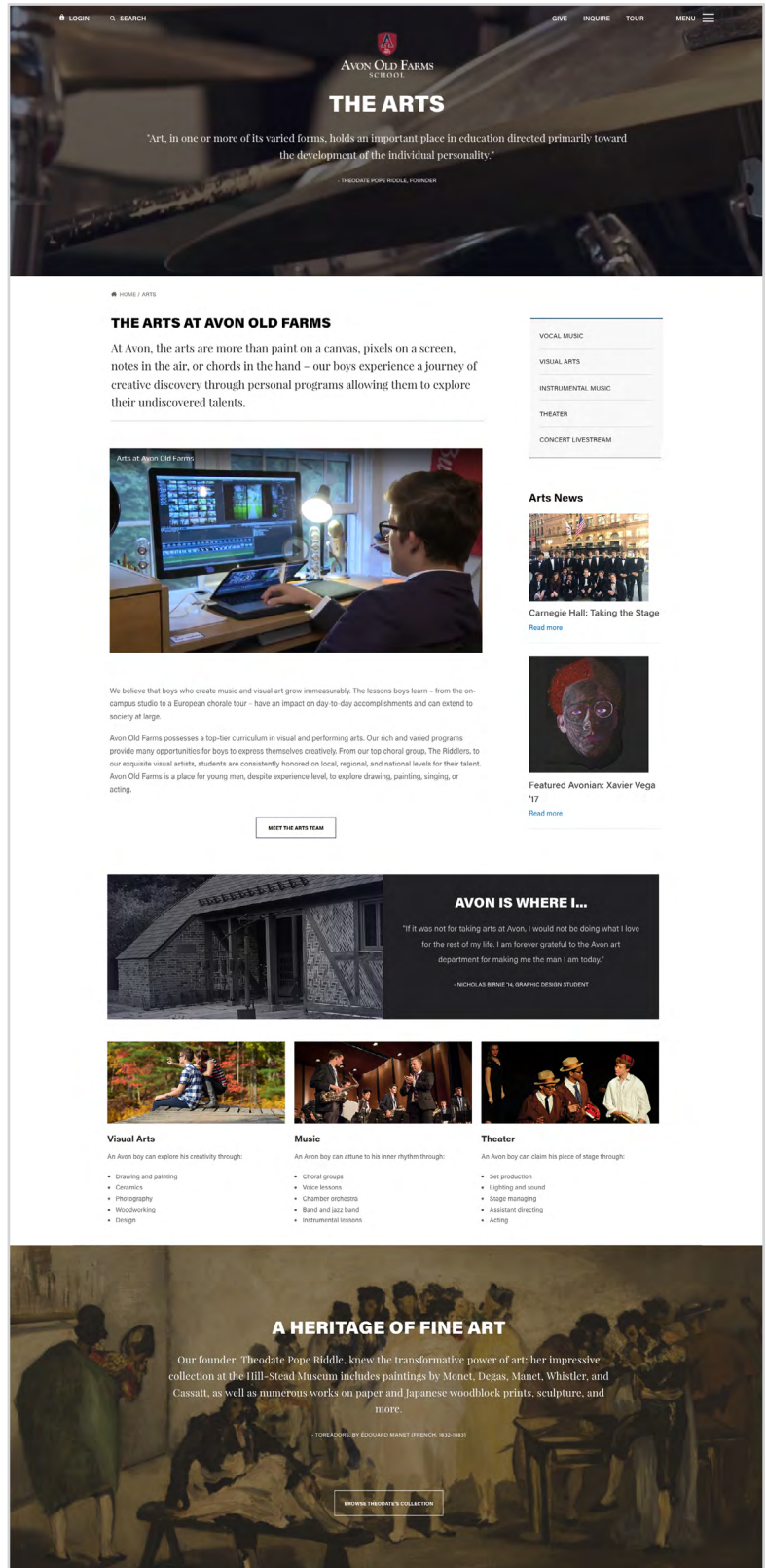
3. Each landing page should tell a story.

A landing page (or even an interior page for that matter) isn't just a web page packed with the wordy content you didn't want to put on your homepage. It's another touch, another opportunity, another chance to engage and inspire your user. Incorporate videos, photos, infographics, student testimonials, and other marketing collateral into a story.

AS YOU DESIGN YOUR LANDING PAGES, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- If this was the first page a prospect visited, what would they expect to find?
- Where would they logically want to go next?
- What is the story we want to tell in this section?

Avon Old Farms School executes landing page storytelling perfectly. Each page has a unique video header, embedded videos, testimonials, and just enough text content to tell their story. Their landing pages are highly engaging, with extremely thoughtful storytelling and navigation. **Visit any page on their website, and it is clear that they thoroughly considered the three questions listed above.**



Landing Pages: Optimizing for Conversions


Now that we've covered some important qualities — let's get to the really important part: the pages designed for conversions.

If a prospective student or alumni is landing on one of these pages, they most likely got here from one of the calls-to-action somewhere else on your site, or even from search. **The goal is to keep them on the page, and essentially force them to convert...without making them feel forced.** It's an art. And it isn't easy. But, by following the general guidelines provided in this section, you should be able to craft multiple landing pages in no time.

WHEN SHOULD I USE THIS TYPE OF LANDING PAGE?

These landing pages should be used when the end goal is a conversion — AKA, a form submission. Some examples include:

- Purchasing tickets for an event
- Completing an inquiry form
- Signing up for an open house
- Requesting to download an information booklet
- Making a donation



The screenshot shows a landing page for Boston Trinity Academy. The header is green with the school's logo and name. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for ABOUT, ADMISSIONS, ACADEMICS, PURPOSEFUL FAITH, ARTS, ATHLETICS, STUDENT LIFE, ALUMNI, and SUPPORT US. The main content area features a large photo of six diverse students smiling. Below the photo is the text "Academic Excellence. Purposeful Faith. Authentic Community." followed by "Inquire now to learn how you can grow at Boston Trinity Academy." and a prominent "Inquire Now!" button. To the left of the button is a form titled "Inquiry for Boston Trinity Academy" with sections for "Personal information" (Parent/guardian first name, last name, Email) and "Student information" (Student first name, preferred name, last name, Gender, Birthdate, Intended to attend year). To the right of the form is a smaller photo of students in a hallway, followed by the heading "Why Boston Trinity?" and a list of bullet points: 7% Student teacher ratio, 99% college acceptance rate, Commitment to meaningful financial aid, Vibrant spiritual life, and Culturally rich. Below this is a quote from Chris Picard: "Boston trinity always pushes me to be better than what I was before."

The Anatomy of High-Converting Landing Pages

Landing pages — whether for alumni donations or admission inquiries — have the same important content.

1) A Value Proposition

Your value proposition should dominate the top of the page. It will be the first thing a site visitor's eyes glance over before determining whether or not they should stay on the page. This is your chance to make a statement about why someone should apply to your school.

In other words, the header on your landing page shouldn't be something like "Donate" or "The Fund for Choate." You're throwing a grand opportunity out the window. Use it to say something about the experience at your school.

YOUR LANDING PAGE VALUE PROPOSITION SHOULD CONSIST OF THREE MAIN ELEMENTS:

- **A header:** Your main value proposition
- **A sub header:** A secondary statement that provides additional information
- **A re-affirming statement:** Located about one-third or one-half of the way down the page, this statement is intended to re-affirm the value proposition after they've scanned the page for additional content. It should be in bullet form to make it easy-to-read.

The goal of your value proposition is to convince the website visitor that the benefits outweigh the costs of filling out the form. It also alleviates any pain or reservations the website visitor may feel.

So, while it is important to mention what they gain — personally, academically, or professionally — by filling out the form, it is also important to note any concerns they may have.

VALUE PROPOSITION ANATOMY

Why CHCA?



Beautiful Things happen at CHCA ...

At CHCA, you can CHOOSE MORE.

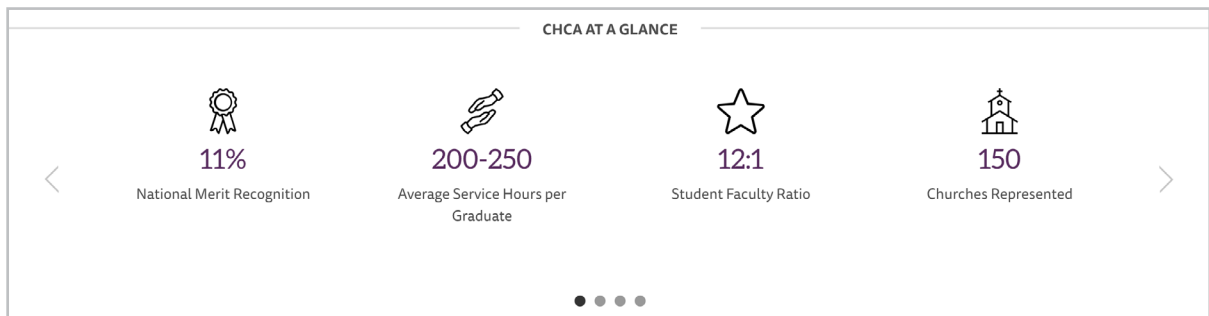
CHCA offers an extraordinary education unlike any within the city. Beginning at age 2 and continuing through graduation, your student will question, consider, discover, test, fail, and thrive, all while under the counsel of exceptional Christian teachers and countless hands-on opportunities. And as students engage and grow cognitively, spiritually, and socially, they are ultimately prepared to flourish both inside and out of the classroom walls.

At CHCA you can do and BE MORE than you ever imagined.

But don't just take our word for it, see what our students, alum, parents, and teachers have to say about their CHCA experience.

[Request Information](#)

HEADER & SUB-HEADER (ABOVE)



RE-AFFIRMING VALUE STATEMENT (ABOVE)

Note: While Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy uses an infographic for their re-affirming value proposition, you can also use a bulleted list.

Hey! Are you feeling a little lost on value propositions? Don't worry! We cover them in detail in section 5 of this eBook.

2) A Compelling Photo or Video

Landing pages with video have higher conversion rates than those that don't — up to **80% higher, actually** — so incorporating an admissions video is key. ([Source](#)) However, if you don't have the budget or resources to put together a video that pulls on those

heartstrings, opt for a photo or series of photos that would have the same effect.

The All-Girl Advantage

There is no such thing as a typical Holton girl. We take great pride in developing each girl's unique gifts and talents. A Holton girl is anything but typical. We attribute this in large part to the all-girl advantage at Holton.

Here, young women of diverse backgrounds can take risks, learn from mistakes, pursue opportunities for leadership, develop confidence, and build lifelong friendships to help them lead lives of positive influence in a supportive environment without fear of social retribution.

Single-gender education is not merely a matter of separating girls and boys. At a girls' school, it's about making sure girls take center stage, while

View our video:



3) A Quick List of Benefits

Think about the biggest and most important “wow” factors that set your school or event apart, and make them easy-to-scan. Use a bulleted list or infographic to accomplish this. This can also be your **re-affirming value statement** as covered under the first bullet of this section.

For example, instead of writing “Our Open House is an opportunity to explore the campus,” think about standing in the shoes of the prospective student. What can they do at your open house? What will they explore, exactly? What will they gain? **Come up with 3-5 unique and compelling bullets and place them beneath your re-affirming value statement.**

PRO TIP

Don't say WHAT the event does, or what your annual fund IS. Rather, express how the event or program you are trying to promote benefits the donor.

4) Social Proof

Bring in the testimonials! Whether you choose to have video or text testimonials, incorporate social proof that your school is worth the investment.

Apply



There's more to Trinity Prep than excellence in academics, sports, and arts. We want to show you why!

We are committed to making your school experience enriching and rewarding, and we couldn't be happier that you are considering us.

Now that you've gotten to know more about Trinity Prep, we want to know about you! Tell us what you love to do, why you want to be a Trinity Prep Saint, and what your goals are. There are five simple steps to complete an application, outlined below. If you have any questions at all, a member of our admission staff will be more than happy to help.

Please call 321-282-2515 with questions or complete an online inquiry.

"The TPS family embodies everything that defines a family: supportive, loving, caring, encouraging. I am so thankful to be part of this community."

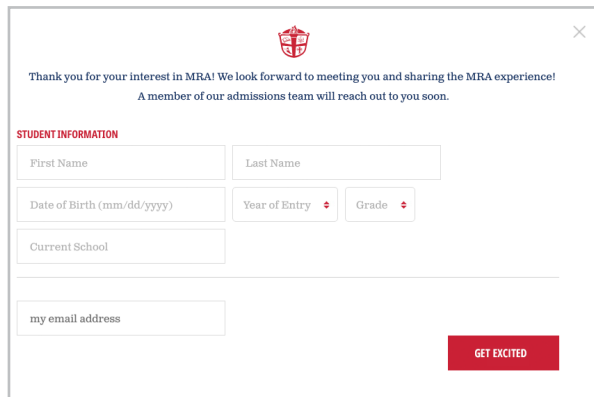
Quotes from parents, students, faculty and alumni are key to increasing conversions, as over **70% of Americans say they look at reviews before making a purchase/decision**, and **63% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase or decision from a site that has ratings and reviews.** ([Source](#)) This logic transfers over to landing pages, as website visitors are more likely to make a decision if they see that people who are like themselves have already made a similar decision.

Incorporate at least 2-3 quotes (with headshots, if you have them) on a landing page. You can also bring in social media by embedding social media feeds that promote a particular hashtag or event. Using recent news stories is also a great idea to show updates for a particular event or cause. Depending on the type of landing page you're building, the type of social proof you incorporate will vary.

5) A Simple Form With a Call-to-Action

Rather than directing prospective students off your site to another form from your Student Information System, incorporate a form on the landing page with about five form fields. Then, have the call-to-action button on the form be the **only call-to-action on the page**.

We highly recommend that the button does not say “Submit,” as it doesn’t encourage action or excitement, and typically has lower conversion rates.



The screenshot shows a form titled "STUDENT INFORMATION" with a red shield logo at the top. Below the logo is a thank-you message: "Thank you for your interest in MRA! We look forward to meeting you and sharing the MRA experience! A member of our admissions team will reach out to you soon." The form fields include: "First Name", "Last Name", "Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)", "Year of Entry" (dropdown), "Grade" (dropdown), "Current School", and "my email address". A red button labeled "GET EXCITED" is positioned at the bottom right of the form.

It should reference the action being taken, such as “Sign Up!” or “Give Back!” It needs to be something that inspires action. A word like “Submit” or “Click here” does not.

A good landing page will not send site visitors elsewhere — meaning don’t incorporate other calls-to-action or options. The fewer options, the higher the conversion. Once prospects have submitted the form, you can redirect them to a “Thank You” page. On this page, you can incorporate additional calls-to-action and content to keep their journey going.

6) Removal of Navigation Elements

Keeping in mind that we don’t want to divert website visitors to another page, these kinds of pages should eliminate your site’s main navigation. While it may seem counter-productive to make it hard to get back to your website, it is critical to think about the journey.

They landed on this page to make an action, so let them. Don’t give them the option not to. Your logo and a nice image are all that is required at the top of your page.

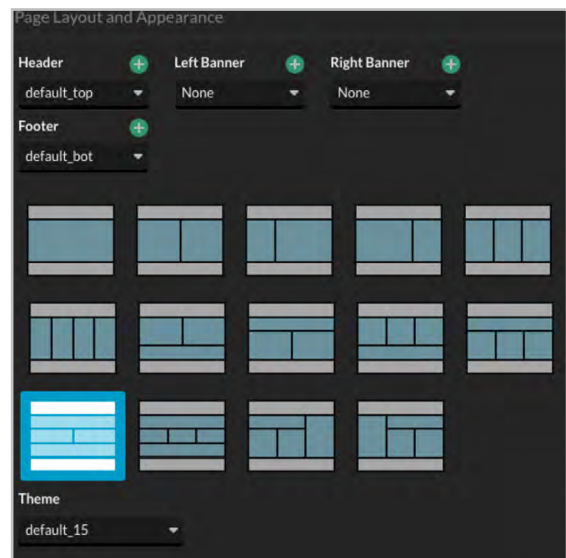
How to Build a High-Converting Landing Page

Using Composer, it's easy to drag, drop, and build an awesome admissions landing page in minutes. On the following pages, we outline the steps of creating a high-converting landing page using Finalsite's CMS, Composer.

Before you get started, think of any elements you love on your site that you want to incorporate on your landing page. Maybe you have testimonials on your homepage you'd like to bring in, or a list of fast facts. Simply select the element you want to use on your landing page, and make it a "Shared Element." This way, you can easily bring it into your landing page. You can also use the new copy and paste feature.

STEP 1 Under your "Admissions" page, create a new page for your landing page. For the sake of this ebook, it is an inquiry page.

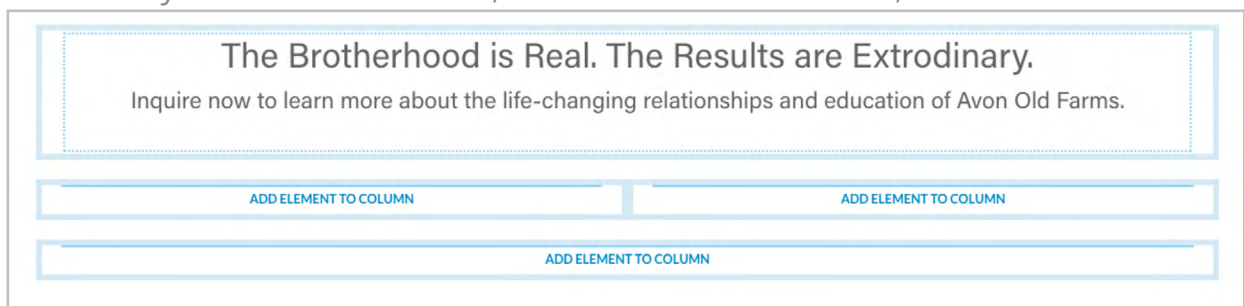
STEP 2 Enter Composer mode, and then select the layout that looks like this (right):



This layout will allow you to add all the necessary elements for a successful landing page in an organized layout that also works great on mobile devices.

STEP 3 Add a "Content" element to the top content block. This area is for the header and sub-header of your value proposition (below).

STEP 4 To your left-hand column, add an element for media, as well as an



element for content. If you're using Media Manager for your photo or video, use the Media module element. If you're bringing in a video from YouTube or Vimeo, use the embed element.

In this left-hand column, you will also want to incorporate your fast facts and benefits.


This can be done in a bulleted list or infographic format.

STEP 5 To the right-hand column, simply bring in your form. This is all that needs to go here.

STEP 6 To the bottom content area, bring in your social proof.

STEP 7 Remove the page's navigation, by selecting the "Header" as "none."


The Brotherhood is Real. The Results are Extraordinary.
Inquire now to learn more about the life-changing relationships and education of Avon Old Farms.



Why Avon?

- 100% of our graduates attend top-tier colleges
- We have 37 teacher-coaches
- 35% of students received scholarships totaling over \$4.3 million

The Brotherhood is Real. The Results are Extraordinary.
Inquire now to learn more about the life-changing relationships and education of Avon Old Farms.



Inquire Now!

First Name

Last Name

Email

Which sports interest you?

Which grade will you be entering?

[Inquire](#)

"Avon is a place of countless opportunities for young men who are in pursuit of academic excellence, sound character development, and athletic and artistic training at the highest levels."

- Brendon Welker '91


Depending on what is automatically in your footer, you may also want to set the "Footer" as "none." The header and footer settings are located in the Page Layout options.

While it is a best practice to remove navigation from these landing pages to increase conversions, if you wish to maintain some form of navigation, it won't kill conversion rates *dramatically*.

STEP 8 Publish! Time to sit back and enjoy the finished product.

The Brotherhood is Real. The Results are Extrodinary.

Inquire now to learn more about the life-changing relationships and education of Avon Old Farms.



Inquire Now!

First Name

Last Name

Email

Which sports interest you?

Which grade will you be entering?

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- 100% of our graduates attend top-tier colleges
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- Brendon Welker '91

Avon Old Farms School
500 Old Farms Road, Avon, Connecticut 06001
(860) 404-4100
[Contact Us](#)

Powered by Finalsite

While in this section we used an admissions page for an example, these practices can be applied to other pages on your site as well. Advancement professionals would greatly benefit from a similar page structure for driving donations.

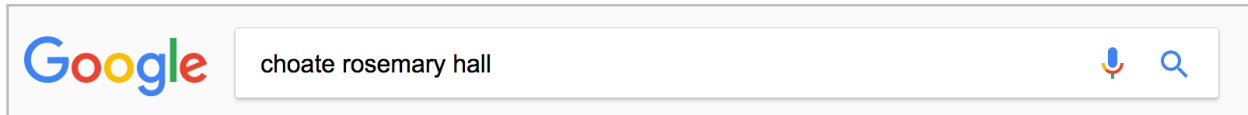
Part Three

Optimizing for Search

*You can have the best website in the world...
but if no one can find you, what is it worth?*

Search Engine Optimization + Your Website

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is often a strategy set aside by independent schools and — especially those with small marketing departments — because of the immense amount of work and upkeep it requires.



SEO isn't something you just do once and hope for the best. Because algorithms are constantly changing and the bots crawling your site are getting smarter, it is essential that you constantly re-visit best practices and strategies, and how they relate to the success of your website. In this section, we will cover multiple guiding strategies to help you shape your search engine optimization strategy.

DEFINITIONS OF IMPORTANT SEARCH-RELATED TERMS USED IN THIS SECTION

SERP: SERP stands for Search Engine Results Page. A SERP is what is returned to you after typing in a search query. In essence, it's a page of results after you search.

Bounce Rate: The percentage of visitors to a particular website who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page.

Exit Pages: The last page a visitor views before leaving your site.

Entrance/Landing Pages: An entry page is a page located on your site that is the first page of your site which a visitor sees, also known as a landing page. The page the visitor came from is the referring page or referrer.

Title Tag: A title tag, or page title is a tag in the .html denoted by <title>. The title tag represents the page's title and can be seen on the tabs in your browser or in the headline of a search result. Title tags help both the search engines and internet users identify what your pages are about. Best practice for title tags is to create unique, relevant titles for each one of your pages.

Meta description: A meta description is another .html tag, but its purpose is to describe the page. Like title tags, it's important to have unique, relevant descriptions for each page and make sure to include a call-to-action!

Branded and Unbranded Searches

In this section, we'll often reference branded and unbranded searches, and how your site needs to be optimized for both types of search engine queries.

BRANDED SEARCHES

These type of search engine queries include your school's name plus a particular piece of content, such as "Baylor school scholarships," or "Trinity-Pawling athletics." These kinds of searches serve up interior pages of your website prior to your homepage, because Google wants to help searchers find information quickly.

IMPLICATIONS OF BRANDED SEARCH

If someone is conducting a branded search, it means they already know about your institution. So at this point, you're not competing for rankings, but you could be your own worst enemy. Because branded searches serve up interior pages of your website, families are entering your site through a "mudroom" rather than a "front door." So, if your interior pages are messy, confusing, or disorganized, you may have trouble keeping new website visitors on your site.

To get an idea of which interior pages you need to focus on, use Google Analytics to create a report of top entry points on your website. While you might be too busy to tackle all your interior pages, starting with your top 10 entry points will greatly improve your bounce rates.

In addition, branded searches also result in what we call the 0th impression, or, the search impression — the impression before the intended first impression of your website. Within search results, searchers can see your social media pages, display ads, directories, ratings, rankings, bad press and so much more — just on Page 1. So if they see something they don't like they may never even visit your website.

TAKE CONTROL OF SEARCH RESULTS

Do a quick search of your school's name. If you don't like what you see, there are a few steps you can take to improve the way your school is represented in search, including: taking control of Wikipedia pages, specifying your social pages, and asking families to write good reviews.

UNBRANDED SEARCHES

Unbranded searches are where schools meet the most head-to-head competition. These are general searches for independent schools that serve a particular interest, location, or goal, such as:

- Best private schools in Boston
- Boarding schools in Maine
- Top art schools in California

It is in these unbranded searches where independent schools have to work their hardest to earn the clicks and homepage design becomes critically important.

IMPLICATIONS OF UNBRANDED SEARCH

83% of search query paths (AKA, a simple Google search) begin with an unbranded term. ([Source](#)) This means that the majority of prospective students are looking for an education that best fits their needs. These searches suggest that word-of-mouth-marketing might be dying and underscores the importance of optimizing your website for search and using Pay-Per-Click (PPC) ads to ensure visibility in the searches that matter for your school.

In addition to the massive amount of website traffic stemming from unbranded searches, 60% of all organic clicks go to the top three search results. ([Source](#)) Top of the page means top of mind for lazy, quick-to-make-a-decision high school students.

If your school's website isn't appearing in the top 3 search results — or even the first page — chances are your website won't be found in unbranded search queries (which comprise the majority of searches). In one study, only 7.4% of clicks were below the 4th organic listing on a mobile device, versus 16% on a desktop, and only 62.9% of tasks resulted in a scroll-down. ([Source](#))

Optimizing for Branded and Unbranded Searches

The goal of SEO is to drive more qualified traffic by:

- Appearing in the searches that matter to your school
- Appearing at the top of search for unbranded searches
- Serving up relevant interior pages from branded searches

The end goal is to lower bounce rates, increase the number of pages per visit and conversions. While the best-executed SEO strategies take a lot of time and effort, there are some easy strategies you can implement on your website now to optimize your website for search.

USE PLAIN TEXT IN THE PLACES THAT MATTER

It's a time where there is a strong focus on digital storytelling — more photos, more videos, more content. And while your school's story is the heartbeat of a successful marketing campaign — what is it worth if prospective families can't find you?

Good use of plain text, accompanied by your school's digital content, can improve its performance in search because of the importance of Google's NAP+W (Name Address Phone + Website) score. Because local search engines use NAP information to judge the accuracy of the data in their own indexes, consistent plain text across your website and directories like Yellowpages.com ensure that Google sees your website as legitimate, improving its search ranking.

PLAIN TEXT SHOULD BE IN THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS ON YOUR SCHOOL'S WEBSITE:

The footer: Rather than use your school's logo in the footer, opt for using plain text. By nature, its purpose is to include the contact information for your school, so don't get fancy. Include your school's full, official name, address, and phone number — as well as any other important details or contact information.

The header: The name of your school needs to be incorporated in the first panel of your homepage in plain text. You can choose to write your school's name in plain text, add a brief description below it, or add ALT text (the text that displays when an image doesn't load) to your image logo.

Add ALT text for images: Adding ALT text for images can be cumbersome, especially when you're uploading dozens of photos to your website. However, ALT text is critical for ADA compliancy and improving search rankings.

CRAFT TITLE TAGS + META-DESCRIPTIONS FOR EVERY PAGE

Too often, independent schools are guilty of making their **homepage title tag** (the phrases that appear on search engine results pages) simply their school name — or their school's name plus the word "Home." And while that is descriptive of who you are, it isn't helping you — especially in unbranded searches. **Remember, that's where 83% of online experiences begin!**

So, think about which terms a prospective student would use when they're looking for your school. Are you a private catholic school in Charlotte? Are you a top boarding school in Texas? Use this term in conjunction with your school's name for the perfect page title tag. On your homepage, it is best to stick to a general term, but for interior pages regarding specific programs or accolades, you can be more detailed with your **title tags**.

PRO TIP

Remember that Google search truncates page titles that exceed 55 characters, so play around with some different combinations.

In addition to your title tag, a website page's meta description is also critically important. A **meta description** is an HTML and XHTML element that describes your page to search engines and plays a significant role in SEO rankings.

Allowing you **155 characters before becoming truncated**, you have the opportunity to define who you are in a bit more detail. The goal of the meta-description is to drive qualified site traffic. It can be simple, or it can be compelling.

TITLE TAG

Choate Rosemary Hall: Home

<https://www.choate.edu/> ▼

Coeducational boarding and day school for grades 9-12. A rigorous academic curriculum with an emphasis on character formation is at the core of the school's ...

You've visited this page many times. Last visit: 2/7/17

META DESCRIPTION

SEO Self-Check

STEP 1: ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Where are you located?
2. In general, what do you do? (ex. all-boys boarding school)
3. What are your top 10 entry points (pages through which visitors enter your website)? **You can find this data in Google Analytics in Behavior > Site Content > All Pages, and then filter by Entrances.**

STEP 2: CONDUCT A SELF-SEARCH AUDIT

NOTE: Conduct this audit in an "incognito window" in your browser. This will prevent Google from remembering your previous searches and automatically favoring your school in search. An incognito window will be a blank slate.

First, conduct an unbranded search for a category your school falls into.

Ex: all-girls schools. Page ranking: _____

Second, conduct an unbranded search for your school's location.

Ex: best private schools in CT. Page ranking: _____

Third, conduct branded searches for your of your school name + the names of your top entry points. **Note each of their page rankings below:**

If your website does not rank on Page 1 for these searches at all, SEO work is critical.

If you rank on Page 1, but not in the top 3, you still need work.

Title Tag + Meta Description Cheat Sheet

Title Tags

GUIDELINES

- 55 characters or fewer
- Always include school name — important for branded searches
- For homepage, include school name + location, or other defining keyword
- For all interior pages, include school name + page content + other defining keyword (if room allows or necessary)

EXAMPLES

The Mead School | Private School and Child Care

Top Private All Boys Boarding High School in CT | Avon Old Farms

Meta Descriptions

GUIDELINES

- 155 characters or fewer
- Avoid sharing your school's mission word-for-word
- Focus on the keywords that prospective families would search for to find your independent school

EXAMPLES

An independent, progressive, day school for infants - grade 8 located in Stamford, CT.

Avon Old Farms has been inspiring excellence in young men since 1927. Learn more about our college-prep curriculum, arts, athletics, community service, & more!

Part Four

Crafting Calls-to-Action that Convert

*The goal is to create a journey — click by click
and page by page.*

What Makes a Great Call-to-Action?

A Call-to-Action (CTA) is an image or text that's sole purpose is to prompt your site visitor to take an action like click the button, download an application, or fill out a form. Chances are, your users see these dozens of times during their search. So how do you make yours stand out?

WE'VE DEFINED SIX FACTORS THAT GO INTO CRAFTING THE PERFECT CALL-TO-ACTION BUTTON EXPERIENCE.

Factor 1: It needs to have a great design.

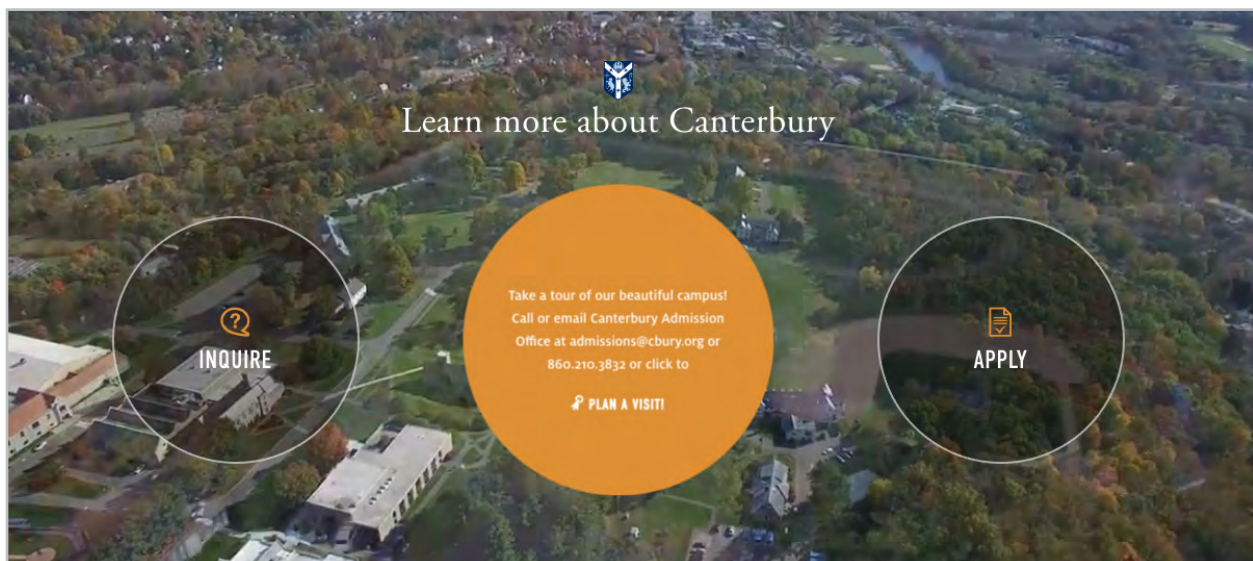
You only have about seven seconds —or less — to get the attention of a website visitor. So, when a prospective student lands on your website, where is the first place you want them to land?

A good call-to-action offers an obvious next step with a design that is eye-catching, obviously clickable, and interactive.

For example, when you visit Purnell School’s “The Purnell Difference” page of their website, a series of animations appear on scroll — including this final animation that boasts a 100% acceptance rate, followed by three relevant calls-to-action.

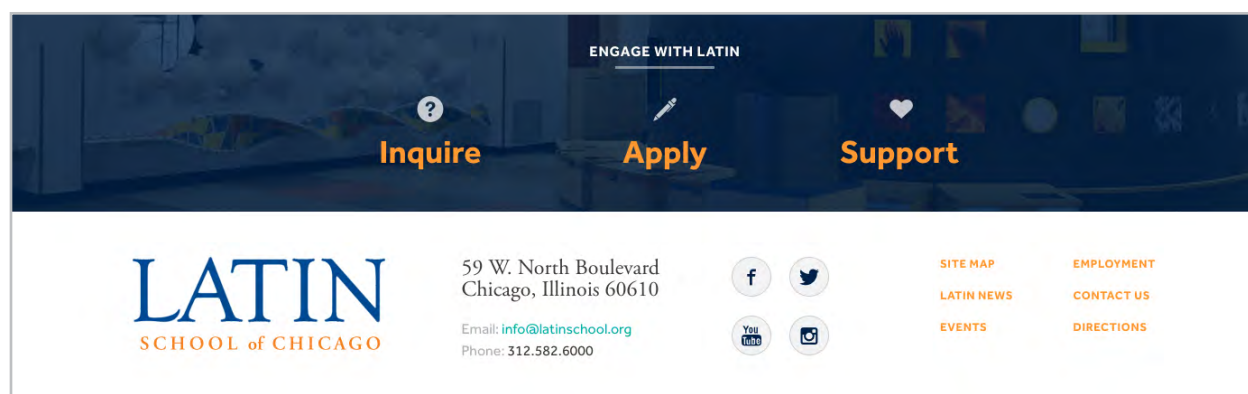


Keeping them simple, yet eye-catching, is key to getting clicks. These CTA buttons on Canterbury School’s homepage have a subtle hover effect that explains exactly what will happen when they click. The video background and orange accent color makes these stand out on the homepage, too!



Factor 2: It's all about location.

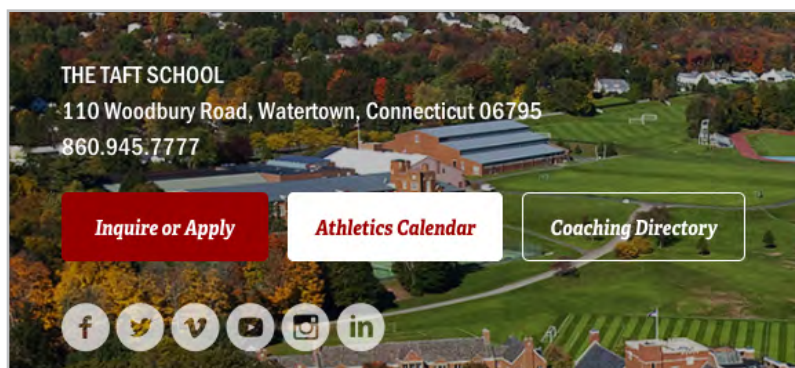
Focus on asking yourself this question: If a website visitor came to this page, what would they want to do next? Calls-to-action are all about creating a journey for the user. So what's the use of a call-to-action if you've hidden it from the glancing eye? Today's users are scanners and scrollers. Place calls-to-action in plain sight to guide the user to their "next step" at any point during their journey — and that goes for all pages on your site.



Placing calls-to-action at the very bottom of a homepage is an extremely effective practice, and keeps users engaged and moving on to the next step, rather than forcing them to scroll back up and figure out where to go next.

Calls-to-actions are not limited to your homepage or landing pages. But rather, should be on every page of your website, especially top-hit pages like employment and admissions. Using Google Analytics, identify your top 25 pages for site visitors and be sure you have at least one good call-to-action on each page.

It is important that CTAs are specific to the page on which they exist. For example, having an "Apply Now" button in the Athletics section won't make sense. Taft School switches out the calls-to-action in the footers of each section of their website to offer both a consistent design and targeted buttons.



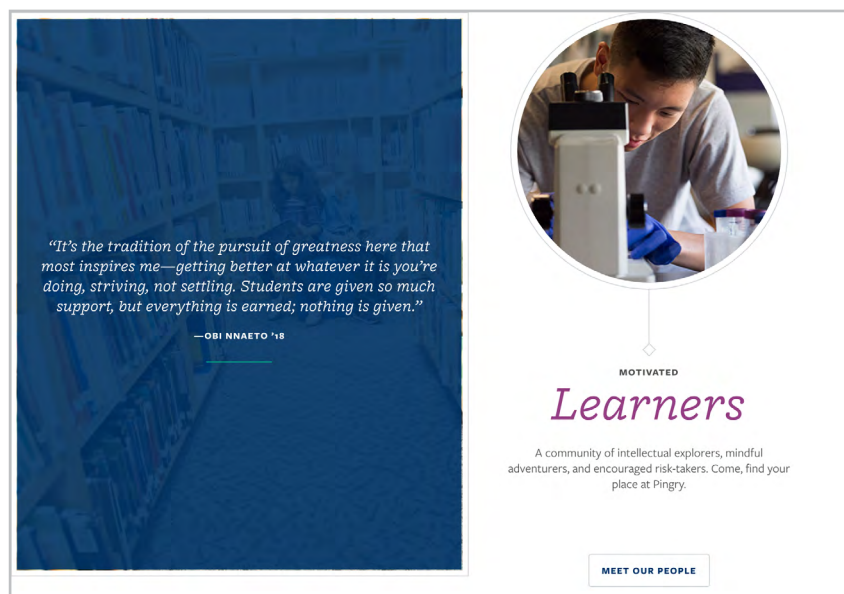
Factor 3: It's well-written and uses actionable words.

Calls-to-action aren't your place to be vague or too creative. Well-written buttons that keep it simple with direct and active phrases get the most clicks. "Apply now," "Sign up for our open house," and "Learn more" are active phrases that let users know exactly where they are going next. Avoid using terms like "Submit" or "Click Here" for optimal conversion rates.

Lakeside School's interactive homepage reveals numerous photos with calls-to-action as you scroll down the page. The use of action words (instead of nouns) makes the user feel as though they are taking a step in the journey and making a decision, increasing click-through rates.



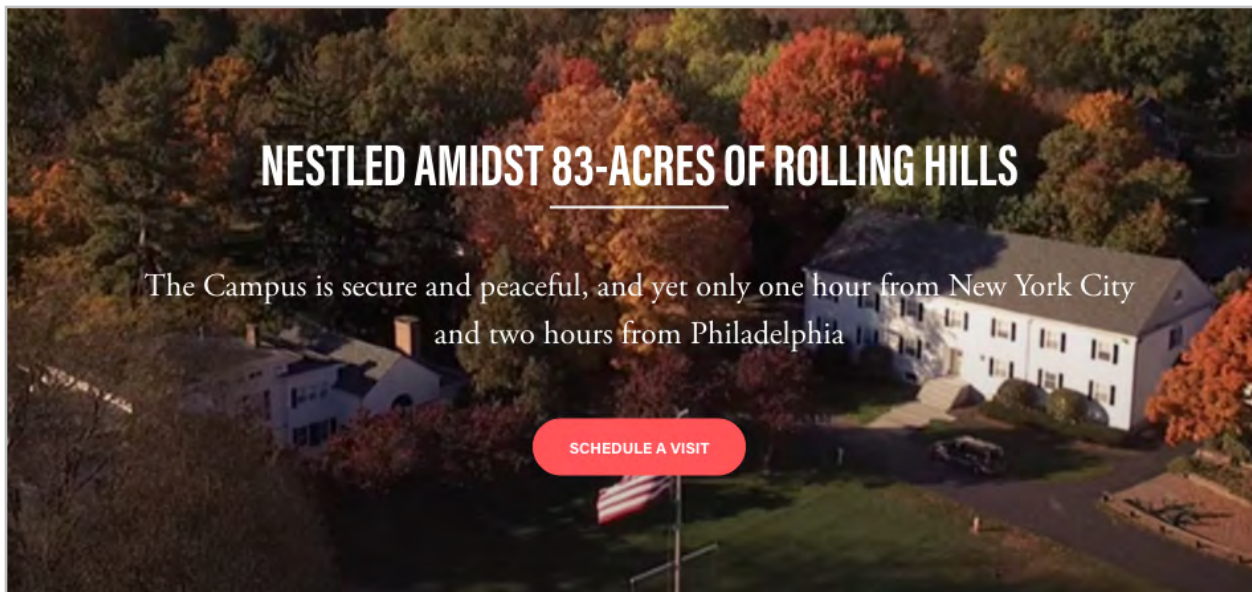
The Pingry School Takes a similar approach on their homepage. As you scroll down the homepage, you have the opportunity to learn more about faculty, student life, academics and more. Each photo that is revealed is accompanied by an actionable CTA. Our personal favorite? "Meet Our People."



Factor 4: It's not surrounded by noise.

Calls-to-action should be in plain sight and placed with relevant information, as mentioned earlier in this section. If you want to draw attention to a particular CTA, do not bury it beneath text or at the bottom of a page.

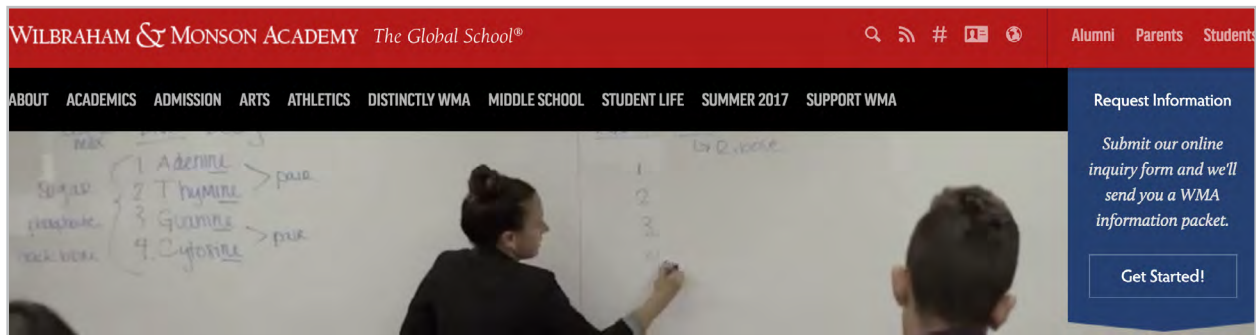
For example, Purnell School's final panel on their homepage stands out to the website visitor. Located at the very bottom of the homepage, strategically placed after an interactive element describing their location, this CTA is easy to see, and the high-resolution photograph background is a delightful contrast from the other elements on the homepage.



Factor 5: It offers a reward.

When a user takes the next step to fill out an inquiry or application form, remember that **you also need to communicate what the user will get out of completing the call-to-action.**

If they filled out a form, when will they hear from you next? Will it be via email or phone? Will you email any materials immediately? What can they do next?

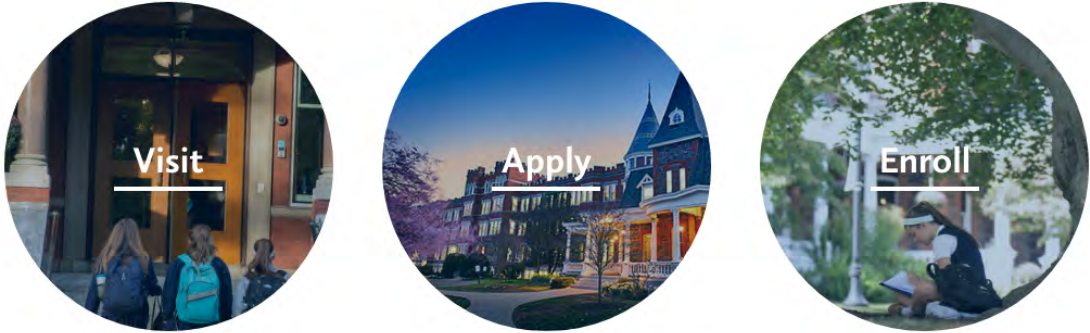


Docked in Wilbraham & Moson Academy's navigation is a blue "Request Information" button that drops down when you hover. Before you hit "Get Started" the CTA reveals exactly what the prospective student will receive when they submit the form, helping to communicate the value exchange.

Factor 6: It attracts a particular audience.

In a perfect world each prospective student that visits your website is ready to apply, but chances are at first they are just perusing — and comparing you to other schools. Therefore, it's important to offer calls-to-action for website visitors at every stage of the application process.

Adding buttons to inquire, apply, visit or learn more will make sure you hit the needs of every audience.



The image shows three circular icons arranged horizontally. The first icon, labeled 'Visit', shows a group of people standing in front of a building entrance. The second icon, labeled 'Apply', shows a large, ornate building at dusk. The third icon, labeled 'Enroll', shows a student sitting on a bench reading a book.

The Luralton Distinction

Are you looking for a college preparatory school that has an outstanding academic curriculum, where you can take a writing workshop with a famous poet, research cell biology with a scientist, direct a play? *Then Luralton is for you.*

[Request more information](#)

Part Five

The Art of the Perfect Value Proposition

Articulating the classes, culture, faculty and experiences that are unique to your school is key to a successful website and digital marketing strategy.

Value Propositions: Defined

Explaining what makes your school great sounds like an easy task to most passionate professionals in education marketing. After all, you know first hand everything that makes your institution stand apart from the rest.

To much disappointment, “general” statements, such as, *we have a rigorous business program*, get lost in the crowd. Articulating exactly *why* a prospective student should choose your school — and not the competing private school down the street or more affordable public school — can be much more difficult than it seems.

WE CALL THIS ARTICULATING YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION.

A value proposition is a statement that describes the benefits students and families can expect from attending your institution, and why your offerings make a better choice than the alternatives. **A value proposition is not a slogan, a positioning statement, or a list of offerings and features.**

Your value proposition is a statement (usually also accompanied by photos, videos, or testimonials) to explain how your school helps a student or family solve a pain problem or fulfill their utmost desire, through your unique solutions.

Because value propositions are specific to a particular target audience, you will have more than one. You’ll write them for your homepage, admissions section, alumni section, athletics...and so forth. While it is important to write a single, overarching value proposition to capture the attention of a website visitor, you need to think on a smaller scale, too.

PRO TIP

When writing your value proposition, put everything through the “So What” or “Why” factor.

Your value proposition is bigger than your championship winning sports team and new art building. **It is how those assets make your school valuable.** Focus on the 5% that makes you special and put that in the forefront. Everything else should be secondary.

The Role of Emotion in Communicating Value

When a prospective, current, or former student visits your website, they want to feel three main emotions: belonging, confidence, and excitement. They also want to feel the alleviation of pain or concern.

BELONGING

Share visual content that shows that everyone fits in, is welcomed, and that there are plenty of opportunities for every skill set, in the classroom, on the field, in the library, or on the stage.

CONFIDENCE

How well is my money being invested? What are the programs like here? What are the faculty members' credentials? Ease the concerns of parents (whose wallets keep getting lighter) by sharing the academic accolades of your school and introducing them to some star faculty members.

EXCITEMENT

This is the very core of what turns a prospective student into an applicant. Content that triggers the emotion of excitement and anticipation will always leave them wanting to learn more — and more importantly, wanting to become a part of your community.

ALLEVIATE PAIN

Students have some pretty hefty concerns. *Will this institution help me land the job (or place in grad school) that I want? Will I make the right connections? Will I be able to pay back my loans?* Using alumni success stories, faculty spotlights, student blogs, and other forms of content that boast the success of your current students and alumni will make prospective students feel confident and excited about the opportunities available at your school. **In order to alleviate pain, you need to be sure that the benefits you present on your website far outweigh the costs... and that is where value propositions come in.**

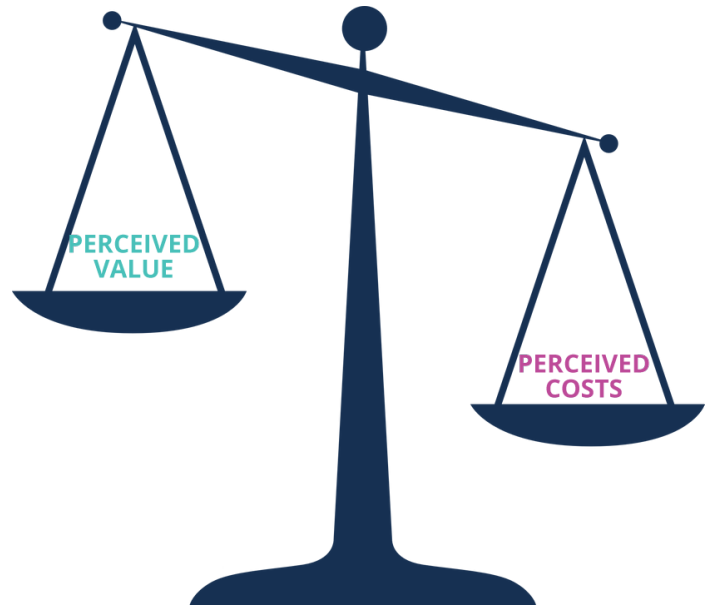
The Value Exchange

So how do you know your value proposition is a good one?

Ask yourself this: out of the thousands of movies and shows on Netflix, how do you choose the right one? If the logline (the one to two sentence description) resonates with you emotionally or logically, chances are high that you'll choose that movie over the one with a logline that falls flat.

The same can be said for value propositions. Once you understand your audience, you can tailor your value proposition to pinpoint pains and desires that will resonate emotionally, such as application frustrations, tuition costs, travel distance, social challenges and college matriculation. Highlighting the ways your school can alleviate those pains makes the costs of not enrolling feel urgent and tangible.

This cost/benefit evaluation occurs at all steps of the application process — from clicking a digital ad to re-enrolling for their senior year.



BECAUSE VALUE NEEDS TO BE EXPRESSED SITEWIDE, START WITH THE FOLLOWING PAGES:

- Homepage
- Admissions landing page
- Inquiry page
- Tuition page
- Athletics landing page
- Academics, Degree or Department landing page
- Giving landing page
- Giving form
- Student life landing page
- Any other page in your tier 1 navigation

How to Identify Your Value Proposition

Identifying your school's value propositions requires three somewhat simple steps:

1. Identify your ideal prospect(s)
2. Understand how you bring them value
3. Know what you offer uniquely well, or at least better than most

When you identify these core concepts you'll be able to better understand the messaging your site should carry. Your messaging should alleviate applicant pains — like cost — and boast applicant gains — like landing a job.

The Layers of A Value Proposition

To make things more (or less) complicated, a value proposition is more than a statement. You can't really say that your school is the best at something, without proving it.

Use the combination of text and media to create a meaningful story and message that conveys the value of your school's education. This is where photos, videos, testimonials, college matriculation lists, and infographics come in.

PRO TIP

When writing your value proposition, focus on the supporting element as much as the text itself.

Testing Effectiveness

The effectiveness of your value proposition can be tested by asking three simple questions:

- Is it unique to your school?
- Can another school say the same thing?
- How is your school doing it better than anyone else?

On the following pages, we'll share a few examples of well-implemented, effective value propositions that possess the following qualities:

- They speak to their target audience
- They are short and to-the-point
- Located in either the first or second panel, they are one of the very first things a prospective family sees
- They explain how a student benefits from your school's education and experience
- They are not a slogan or mission statement
- They are accompanied by a call-to-action or photo that further explains it

Examples of Well-Implemented Value Propositions

SELLING THE VALUE OF TUITION

Having a value proposition on your school's tuition page may be the second most important place to have one aside from your homepage for a couple key reasons:

- It's a top entry point for most independent schools
- You always (always, ALWAYS!) need to back up the cost of something with a reason

Capitol Hill School's interactive panel on their tuition page provides a variety of content on value before offering up tuition costs,

**MORE TIPS FOR A BETTER TUITION PAGE****1. Sell Your Value Before You Name Your Price**

If someone offered you a \$5 cup of coffee and a \$1 cup of coffee, your first action would most likely be to ask “what makes the \$5 cup of coffee so great?” Once you’ve been told what makes it worth the extra \$4, you might splurge, or you might still go for the cheaper option because \$1 stuck with you more than organic Ethiopian hand-picked beans.

But, on the reverse. If someone told you why the coffee was special, and then told you the price...you might be a little more willing to make the purchase.

Implement this same psychology on your school's tuition page. Too often schools think of their tuition page as simply a place to list costs. But it's more important to first talk about what makes your school so special — using infographics, videos, and stats, before you start listing facts and figures.

2. Put an Emphasis on Scholarships and Financial Aid Rather than Tuition

For simplicity, many school websites tend to split “Tuition” and “Financial Aid” into two different pages. However, for independent schools struggling with enrollment, it may be time to re-visit that strategy.

When it comes to price, it’s all about context. Positioning tuition secondary to scholarships and financial aid puts prospective families at ease before applying. It puts the percentage of their tuition being covered in the forefront, before revealing the actual cost of tuition. Consider how you can share your financial aid philosophy before revealing a cost. The combination of compelling, high-quality visual content and text is ideal for easing the pain price point that would hinder them from learning more.

The screenshot shows a website page with the following elements:

- Admission** sidebar menu:
 - Experience the Mission
 - My BA Story
 - Campus Tours
 - Admission Day
 - How To Apply
 - Affording BA** (highlighted in red)
 - FAQ
- Calendar** section:
 - FRI MAR 03
 - 8th Grade Course Request Forms due to Dr. B
- Main Content:** A large video player with the title "Tuition and Financial Aid" and a video titled "Our Financial Aid Philosophy". The video player shows a man speaking and has a progress bar at 03:26. There are social media icons (heart and share) in the top right corner of the video area.

3. Change the Page Title from “Tuition and Financial Aid” to “Affording [School Name]”

This simple switch signifies that you’ll be denoting costs, but that you’re also discussing affordability.

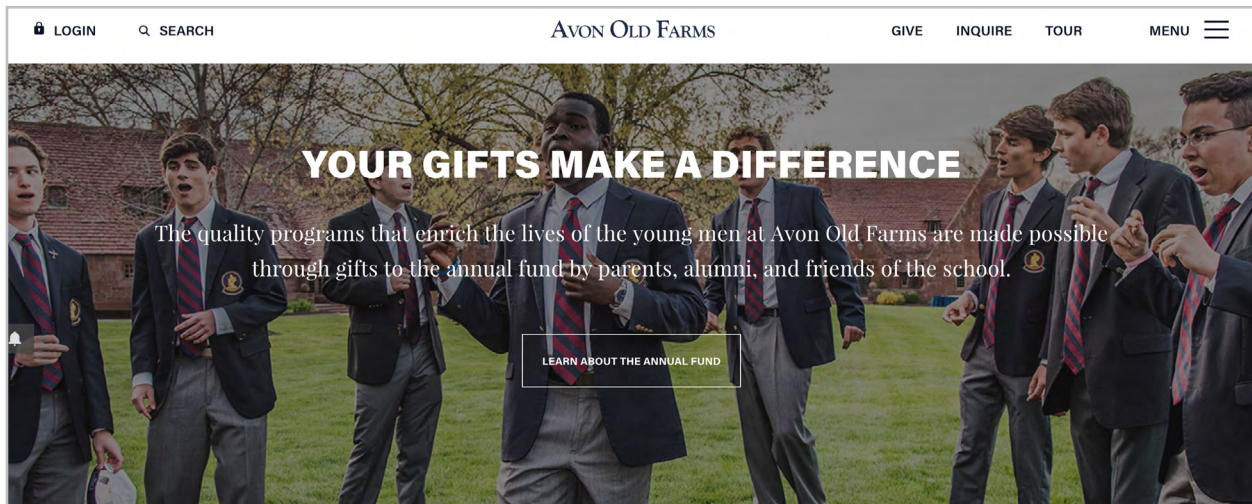
4. End Tuition Pages with a call-to-action

Don’t leave page visitors with a dead end. On your tuition page, be sure you have a call-to-action that encourages them to make the next logical step. A good CTA for a tuition page would be “Inquire,” “Download a Viewbook” or even “Apply.”

SELLING THE VALUE OF YOUR SCHOOL TO YOUR ALUMNI NETWORK

Prospective students are equally as valuable to your school as alumni. They're your network and your net worth. Therefore, it is important to write value propositions that entice even the busiest alumni.

Encouraging them to donate, attend events, volunteer, and even update their information shouldn't be an afterthought. It should be a strategy. For example, Avon Old Farms dual value propositions accompanied by a simple, low-commitment CTA is the perfect combination to increase clicks and donations.



Or, take note from Hawai'i Preparatory Academy who specifically crafted a landing page and value proposition for #GivingTuesday 2016 and received gifts from 25% of all donors.

Make a gift this #GivingTuesday to shape the future.

Giving Tuesday is a global day of giving fueled by the power of social media and collaboration. It is the Tuesday that follows Thanksgiving. This year it falls on November 29, 2016. To participate:

- 1. Give online using the form or Paypal link below.**
- 2. Download and print out this sign.**
- 3. Write in why you gave.**
- 4. Take an #unselfie, post it on your social media account, tag us and use the #hpagivingtuesday.**

Your gift helps HPA students save turtles, build super computers, and create a better world.

Building a Super Computer: Interviews with Current HPA.. 🕒 ↗



Give Online!

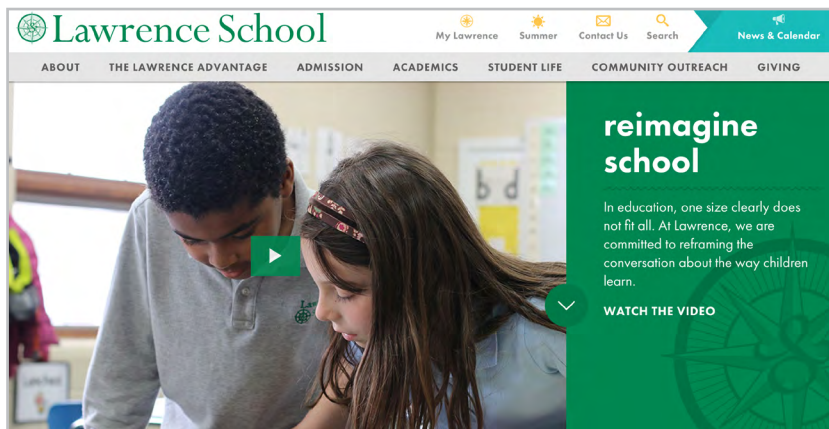
Use this form for credit card gifts, or select PayPal below.

First Name*

SELLING THE VALUE OF YOUR SCHOOL

The most important, yet sometimes hardest, part about writing value propositions is staying true to who you are. Often, it is easy to want to write a value proposition to beat out the competition, or appeal to a particular group — but is it the right group?

For example, *Reimagine School* is not only Lawrence School's main value proposition, but also their learning theory. As a school that accommodates learning differences, Lawrence School invites prospective families to reimagine school along with them by watching their admissions video.



Another great example comes from St. Sebastian's School. What's most notable about this value proposition is its appeal to logos, ethos and pathos — its passion gives you chills, while its simplicity and reference to the headmaster re-affirms its validity.



The effective combination of emotional appeal and social proof is a combination that has now been mirrored by numerous other schools.

Value Proposition Worksheet

PREPARING YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

STEP 1 | Write down your school’s vision statement, mission statement, or value proposition.

STEP 2 | Select 2-3 words or short phrases from the above statement that you believe best illustrate the five percent that set your school apart.

1.

2.

3.

STEP 3 | Provide at least one specific example for each of the words/phrases you selected for Step 2.

1.

2.

3.

STEP 4 | Write down 2-3 things that differentiate your school from your biggest competitors.

1.

2.

3.

Value Proposition Template

WRITING YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

Because value propositions are meant to be used for different, segmented audiences, you can have numerous value propositions on your website. While the way you structure your value propositions should be unique, the following templates will help you identify what you want to say.

TEMPLATE 1

For _____ (target audience)
who _____ (statement of the need or opportunity)
our (school program name) is _____ (define program)
that (statement of benefit) _____ .

EXAMPLE: For applicants needing financial aid, our school's scholarship program provides more than \$500,000 in aid every year.

TEMPLATE 2

Superlative ("why choose this product").

Label ("what is our school").

Qualifiers ("who should come to our school").

EXAMPLE: The only state school in New England with an accredited actuarial science program.

TO GET STARTED, TRY WRITING THESE VALUE PROPOSITIONS:

Write your value proposition for everyone who visits your website.

Write your value proposition for alumni.

Write your value proposition for applicants who need financial aid.

Value Proposition Checklist

PROVING YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

Value propositions should be expressed with text, but supported with photos, videos and testimonials. Below is a checklist of the items you should have to support your value proposition.

- A list of statistics that support your different value propositions
- 2-3 unique photos for each value proposition or one video
- 1 photo or video for each specific example you provided in Step 3 of Preparing Your Value Proposition

If you do not have supporting content for your value propositions, make a list of the individuals at your school who can help obtain or produce it:



About Finalsite

Equipped with all the tools your school needs to be successful online – including a simple CMS, LMS, calendars, news, athletics, email newsletters, teacher pages, systems integration and more – Finalsite is the industry’s premier web marketing and communications platform.

We’re a 200-person strong group of school people who want to make the lives of your school community better. Our team of award-winning designers, marketing pros, SEO experts, project managers, client success managers, stellar support team, and public school consultants are at your service from day one. Our 97% client retention rate is living proof that our team is always as happy as we look in that picture – and you will be too! To discover why more schools are turning to Finalsite visit www.finalsite.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | MIA MAJOR

As Finalsite’s Content Marketing Manager, Mia plans and executes a variety of inbound marketing and digital content strategies. Mia graduated valedictorian from Western New England University in with a degree in Mass Communications. As a former TV reporter, freelance cinematographer and certified inbound marketer, Mia specializes in helping schools find new ways to share their stories online through web design, social media, copywriting, photography and videography.



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