

# HOW TO PROMOTE A TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION PROGRAM

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## Introduction

The advertising, marketing, promotion, and positioning of technology education programs have become increasingly important. Yet the rewards of promoting your program will not only bring more students and resources to your classroom, it will also bring support on a larger scale, resulting in added resources to help all students become more successful. Although you will be selling your program, the benefits that the student might gain should be expressed beyond your needs for facilities, equipment, materials, textbooks, and/or enrollment. The focus should always be on the needs of the student.

To begin promotional activities, you will start by thoroughly investigating and establishing a "unique selling proposition" or USP. A USP can be used to sell technology education to your community. Your USP should always address how your program is critically important for students and should also address the needs of the community, academia, and/or the workforce. The marketing of your program should always be based on the needs of students first.

The purpose of this article is to provide a background teachers can use to begin promoting their programs. I have personally used many of the techniques discussed and wanted to share what I have learned through the friendships, practice, and experiences that I have gained. I must state that my experience is from both accident and good fortune. All of my learning and experiences have occurred in an informal way.

The most critical first step in any formal marketing campaign will be to gain the favor and support of your administration and school board.

**An effective campaign will increase student enrollment, spread goodwill, reflect a positive image, and grow positive involvement.**

## Public Relations and Promotions Within the School

The promotion of a program can parallel a marketing campaign. Public relations, or PR, can be described as an activity used to increase understanding, support, and communication within your community. The ultimate goal of any PR activity is to win favor and goodwill. In order to do this, the public and student interests must always be addressed. Positive communication is the basis of any public relations campaign. Success can be measured through the positive feedback that the students and program will eventually receive.

The path that a teacher must follow in promoting a program begins with local support. The biggest influence

upon growing an educational program is school administration support. Typically, public schools are operated through a hierarchy, and it is important to follow the chain of command, as overstepping the hierarchy may generate negative support.

The purpose of activities for the teacher is to build personal and professional alliances. The alliances will be helpful in providing future support. The support may be aimed at meeting the needs of the student, the school, and the community. Positive program promotion and public relations activities are critical for the sustenance and growth of your program.

Since this article is aimed at technology education, it must be

stated that the focus of all efforts should be on the current and future needs of our students. Teachers provide growth and learning opportunities for students, so the challenge in marketing your program is to use persuasion to communicate how your program is uniquely positioned for meeting the needs of the students, the community, and eventually, the workforce. The public relations effort you develop should always appeal to the wants and needs of the



**LOCAL STUDENTS BUILD CITY**—A group of Driver Middle School seventh graders have designed and are constructing their own city. Named Victoria by the students, the city is slated to have simulations of all the essential services of the typical modern city once it is completed. Pictured in the back row (left to right) are Joanna Torres, Deanna Gerrity, Chris Young and Lisa Staver. Pictured in the front row (left to right) are Michelle Driscoll, Kevyn Aldins, Laura Godsey and Doug Hylton. (N-G photo by Bill Richmond)

## Driver students hylton construct a city

A group of Driver Middle School seventh graders are constructing their own large-scale city under the watchful guidance of their technology education teacher, Mike Fitzgerald. "Students at DMS are provided with experiences related to manufacturing, transportation, construction and engineering." The city-building project was inspired by a city Fitzgerald made to Chicago. At the time, the seventh grade class was studying the forces that affect the strength of structures, constructing wood models and compression testing them for efficiency. When he made the trip the next planned lab activity for Fitzgerald's students was to be the construction of model homes. The activity would provide them with the opportunity to learn the basic parts of a house and how it is framed through the construction of a model. "While I was looking for one of my favorite bagel bakeries (in Chicago) I noticed a new office building under construction," recalls Fitzgerald. "I looked at the building's steel frame forming and wondered why can't we simulate the construction of a city at Driver Middle School?" When I returned, I asked the students if they would like to construct a city.

The students decided to name their city Victoria. They then created a list of structures and services that they might see in a city. It was decided that Victoria would have transportation and education services, offices, hotels, shopping and entertainment. The final step was to divide the tasks among the students and to construct the structures. "While many of the city's buildings are currently under construction, a definite skyline has taken shape. It is defined by the a series of towers and skyscrapers with a model rail train that circles through its metropolis."

Figure 1. Sample class project.

students as well as the community. An effective campaign will increase student enrollment, spread goodwill, reflect a positive image, and grow positive involvement. An effective PR campaign might also bring various charitable contributions from the community.

### Marketing, Advertising, and Public Relations

The process of selling your message to the public is known as marketing. Marketing involves activities such as advertising, packaging, selling, and transferring goods (Webster, 1992). According to the Women's Business Center, the practice of marketing includes the focusing of all efforts having to do with product or service, price, promotion, and placement of the product to people (2003). In education it is important to express that the service is to educate our learner. Teachers add value to their students in the form of knowledge, skills, experience, growth, etc.

Promotion can be described as the arm of marketing used for communication. Advertising, promotions, PR, and salesmanship are all approaches that will be applied in promoting your educational program. The promotion of your campaign may take several forms. Teachers can advertise their programs through outlets such as newspapers, radio, and television. Sales promotions can be thought of as ways to bring the public and the student into the classroom. Examples include advanced placement or articulation agreements. Advanced placement credits with colleges and universities are successful examples of sales promotions that many schools employ. Other opportunities that might be implemented are internships with local business/industry. In Indiana, a new development is the Certificate of Technical Achievement (CTA). CTAs can be used to prove proficiency in technical achievement and are offered through an alliance with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development in collaboration with the Indiana Business Modernization & Technology Corporation. CTAs can be used to document achievement in specific and transferable workplace

skills and knowledge and to help students become placed in the workforce. The documented skills are those that are not readily apparent from simple school transcripts.

The placement of the student within the community can take several forms. The challenge is to demonstrate to the public the unique opportunities your program provides for students. To address this question the teacher must be knowledgeable and create a positive promotional program. In Indiana, the CTA might help in the placement of our student. The skills that we document in students will not only help promote programs, CTAs will also help place our students in the workforce.



Figure 2. Sample class project.

### What is Your Unique Selling Proposition?

In developing an action plan to promote a program, the teacher will need to assess the unique selling proposition (USP). Another way of describing this would be the following question: What can your program offer that students cannot get anywhere else? The USP can be used as the philosophical foundation of your action plan and should be used in every piece of material that you use to promote your program.

### Capture Repeat Customers

A lesson from business that can be applied in your marketing efforts is the following: "Keep in mind that when marketing, 80% of your business [enrollment in education] comes from existing customers [students] and 20% comes from new



Figure 3. Sample news release.

customers. Failing to resell to your current customer base could have a detrimental effect on your profits [program]. It will cost you five times the expense [effort] to sell to a new customer than to sell to an existing customer" (Schneider, 2003).

What educators must continue to do in today's age of accountability is to focus upon the needs of our students. The needs are social, physical, emotional, and academic. The "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) directives have significantly increased the academic expectations placed on both teachers and students. As classroom teachers, we must continue to focus on the academic needs of all students and promote their positive accomplishments at every opportunity.

In marketing, Laura Schneider expresses potential student needs in the following passage:

"Do you know what your potential customers [students] need and want? The truth is that very few businesses [educators] have a good grasp of what it is that their customers [students] need. The secret to avoiding this common error is to find a need you can fill and then fill that need better than anyone else" (2003).

## How to Build Support in Your Classroom, School Building, and Community

Positive relations with your administration, fellow teachers, students, and community will be critical in the success of promoting your program. The biggest mistake that a teacher can make is not seeking the support of the community, colleagues, administration, and students. There are many ways to develop the goodwill and support needed. Team building and cooperative school/community-wide projects can be used to demonstrate the unique qualities that you and your program can offer. Implementing standards from other subject areas will also position your program to be more successful. Developing student involvement opportunities with Habitat for Humanity, Toys for Tots, etc. could also be a great way to promote the students in your program through community involvement.

### Potential Media Sources

- Newspapers
- Newsletters
- Magazines
- Journals
- Radio
- Television
- Electronic newsletters

Figure 5. A listing of potential outlets to communicate your message.

### Kinds of Media Releases

- News releases
- Public Service Announcements
- Guest editorial or public speeches
- Broadcast or print interviews
- Photos and caption promotions
- Special event promotions
- Sponsorship and contribution promotions
- Bylined articles
- Authorship in professional journals

Figure 6. Potential ways to reach an audience through the media.

## How to Sell Your Message

To reach an audience, you will have several media outlets to pursue. Each is unique in the approach that you will use. Figure 5 shows the different kinds of media outlets. Figure 6 describes the kinds of media releases that you may decide to pursue. The advantage in delivering your message is that you will be able to add positive credibility and authority to your program. The goal of the effort is to influence the community about the program that you offer. The benefits that the program provides to students, especially transferable skills and knowledge, should always be highlighted.

What you do not control in the marketing of your campaign is "how often your message will appear, or placement, or where your message will appear." With public relations, a reporter/editor is being "sold" a story. Even if the reporter "buys" the story, there is no guarantee of how or when he will use the story. However, PR has the advantage of third-party credibility. People tend to believe what they read much more than the ads they see. In fact, studies show that a reader is seven times more likely to respond to PR than to advertising, and that articles written by reporters are four times more believable than advertisements" (Eiler Communications, 2003). A news release is a document that briefly calls attention to your program. The attention might be aimed at an event or achievement of your program.

### Potential Sources for Educational Contests

- **NASA Moon Buggy**  
<http://moonbuggy.msfc.nasa.gov/>
- **Super milage vehicles**  
[www.teiwww.org/state%20news/superpics.html](http://www.teiwww.org/state%20news/superpics.html)
- **Hasbro/Sally Ride Science Club, Toy Challenge**  
[www.toychallenge.com/](http://www.toychallenge.com/)
- **Craftsman/NSTA Young Inventors**  
[www.nsta.org/programs/craftsman/](http://www.nsta.org/programs/craftsman/)
- **Technology Student Association**  
[www.tsaweb.org/](http://www.tsaweb.org/)

Figure 7. Sample of potential educational contests and programs to pursue.



Figure 4. Sample class project.

A news release can also be aimed at all areas of the media. Examples include television, print, radio, etc. Often a news release will snowball. For example a news release aired on the radio might also be picked up on televised and printed media.

A Public Service Announcement (PSA) is used primarily to generate goodwill. A PSA is another good outlet to promote your program and what you offer to students. The downfall is that a PSA, like a print advertisement, might incur a large financial cost. A guest editorial, speech, bylined article, or interview can also be an effective way to promote your program. Outlets such as clubs, groups, school functions, journals, and newspapers may all be approached. The reach of personal promotion activities can extend both inside and outside of the community. Unfortunately, being a spokesman requires a great deal of knowledge, charisma, time, and effort.

An easy way to get a message out is to use photos, captions, and special events. A phone call to the local newspaper, along with a brief description of the project, will often place your program on the front page! The "good news" about your students can be used to offset the negative conflicts that we often read about in the newspaper!

### The Role of Contests

The participation in educational contests can also be a positive, "grass roots" way to promote your program. Figure 7 lists interesting competitions that can be beneficial to technology education students. The various contests can be implemented to meet educational goals and develop interest in your program. Contest participation sometimes will also require sponsorships from local business and industry. The positive results of developing relations with local business and industry may bring many rewards. The rewards might extend to the school, the program, and the student.

### The Role of Professional Involvement

Professional involvement is another outlet to pursue in promoting your program and can bring a multitude of rewards in supporting and promoting your program. Figure 8 lists professional organizations that can

help support technology education. The listed organizations provide opportunities for students and teachers alike. Students and teachers might also gain the privilege of presenting topics at conferences as well as the opportunity to network with fellow leaders. Finally, professional involvement will bring opportunities such as competitions, awards, authorship, grants, and scholarships. The benefits gained for your students and your program from a professional organization can increase significantly through the amount of leadership that you provide.

#### Organizations

- **International Technology Education Association**  
www.iteawww.org/
- **Technology Student Association**  
www.tsaweb.org/
- **National Science Teachers Association**  
www.nsta.org/
- **Civil Air Patrol**  
www.capnhq.gov/
- **Technology Educators of Indiana**  
www.teiwww.org/

Figure 8. Sample of organizations with an educational focus.

### Recommendations

In order to successfully promote your education program, I recommend that you first determine the amount of support that you have from your administration and school board. Without local support, your efforts in marketing will be severely lessened. Establish a unique selling proposition. Remember that a USP should be focused on meeting the needs of students. Always express what students will learn and how it will prepare them for the future in a positive way.

Get to know the media outlets from the community. Make contact with the chamber of commerce, government officials, clubs, business and industry. Often these stakeholders are looking for ways to help support students and schools. The stakeholders in the community all recognize that the future of the community is based upon the success of the children. Contributions such as financial support, technical support, leadership, and donations might be available to help the children become successful.

Investigate educational contests. Student contests can bring success to both your students and your program. It is very rewarding to help make students successful. Student participation and success in contests can be used as a positive way to sell your program. Finally, join a professional organization and take a leadership position. Opportunities and resources from recognized leaders will help you bolster your local support from the local, state, national, and international levels.

### Conclusion

You will need to gather alliances from various sources such as parents, administrators, students, fellow teachers, local business/industry, and the media. Alliances with the stakeholders in your community will bring opportunities, resources, and knowledge. All efforts of persuasion should be aimed at promoting the positive experiences that students gain in your program.

Finally, remember that the promotion of your program is up to you. Always



Figure 9. Sample professional recognition.

start your public relations efforts small and always keep your PR efforts positive. Your first step is to plant the seed of success. You can then begin to grow a respected and recognized program for the benefit of your students!

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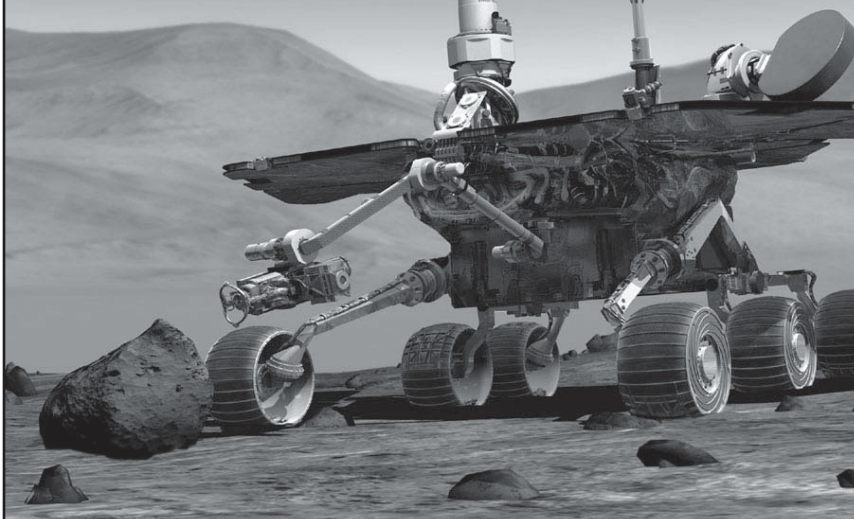
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