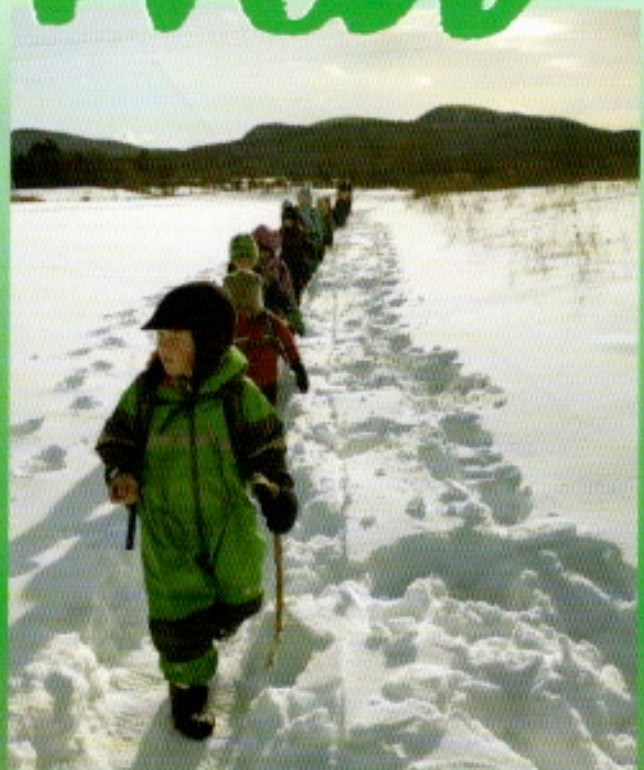


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Looking to the Future — Innovating — Serving Humanity

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Marketing Waldorf Schools

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When I moved my son from public school to Detroit Waldorf School in third grade, I was delighted to find an educational option that perfectly fit my child. Yet, I was dismayed that the Waldorf school wasn't more widely known. As a public relations and marketing entrepreneur, I wanted to spread the word about Waldorf Education. I began to use the marketing strategies listed below. These best practices worked well in Detroit and also at other Waldorf schools where I have consulted on marketing and outreach.

Create Foundational Messaging

"Foundational messaging" serves as the basis for all marketing narratives. Foundational messaging is the core story that comes out of research and discussion by a school's main stakeholders. Foundational messaging includes mission and vision statements, taglines, and five to ten paragraphs regarding the school's origin, perspective, and place. A mission statement should be outward facing and understandable to persons beyond the school community. It articulates what the school strives to achieve today. A vision statement is an internal compass guiding staff and faculty in their path to positively impact the world. All members of the school community—faculty, staff, and parents—should be familiar with the foundational messaging and use it when speaking to prospective parents. A big problem in marketing is that prospective parents often get different messages from different people, each passionately devoted to the school.

Use Storytelling to Promote the School

Part of the foundational messaging is the school's "story." The story might include the school's origins and history, a description of the landscape and buildings, or vivid anecdotes about classroom activities and interactions. In the Waldorf classroom, storytelling informs, educates, and inspires children. In like manner, storytelling marketing is an effective

way to interest and attract people outside the school community. The creation of a school's story should be a team effort, involving teachers, administrators, parents, alumni, and students.

Tell a Positive Story

It is tempting in our marketing to try to dispel myths and correct wrong assumptions about Waldorf Education, such as "Oh, Waldorf doesn't start teaching reading until third grade." It is better, though, to focus on positive aspects of Waldorf pedagogy, such as the integration of subjects and the important role of the arts. By explaining why Waldorf works, we can capture the imagination of prospective parents.

Use Accessible Language

All marketing messaging should be in clear, descriptive language. There are words and phrases used within the Waldorf subculture that are particular to Waldorf Education and unknown in the world at large. We should present Waldorf Education—its philosophy, curriculum, and pedagogy—in a way that bridges worlds and inspires inquiry.

Create and Empower School Ambassadors

Newspaper articles, social media, e-blasts, websites, advertising, and blogging are great marketing tools. However, word of mouth is still the most effective way to attract people. Marketing research reveals that it takes seven touches of an organization before a person takes action—and the most common impetus for engagement is a personal referral. Parents and friends of the school will spread the word, whether asked to do so or not. A school can identify enthusiastic and articulate parents, teachers, and alumni and ask them to be ambassadors promoting the school. The school can train these ambassadors on how to present the school and then encourage them to welcome people at events, use email to invite friends, and share on social media why they love Waldorf. ☉

LYNNE GOLODNER owns *Your People LLC*, a marketing and public relations company in Detroit. She has worked with Detroit Waldorf School, Sacramento Waldorf School, Toronto Waldorf Academy, and Aurora Waldorf School and facilitated an AWSNA webinar and an AWSNA seminar in Chicago. She is the mother of four teenagers.