



Recently, at an area conference, the title of a session caught my eye: “What Pixar Can Teach You about Marketing Your School.” Being a fan of the animated movies produced by Pixar, I headed to the session to hear freelance writer Maura King Scully of MKS Communications tell me how Nemo, Wall-E, and Buzz Lightyear, among many other “experts,” could teach us how to market schools more effectively.

Ms. Scully began by addressing the power of stories. As we’ve discussed in previous Vision articles, the use of stories in advertising is gaining momentum. Why? Because of several different factors. Stories:

- have the power to draw people in and engage them;
- are compelling, since they often involve conflict and resolution;
- stick with readers;
- can be universally understood (think metaphors, fairy tales, parables)
- efficiently present a lot of information quickly;
- have an emotional pull, encouraging readers to sympathize with you; and
- allow readers to persuade themselves and draw their own conclusions.

Clearly, stories can lead to readers/viewers taking the positive actions that marketers are seeking.

Demonstrating a school’s benefits via a story can be far more effective and will make a more lasting impression than endless text describing a school’s many features. To ensure that your story will “stick” with the audience, make sure that it is simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, and emotional. What does all this have to do with cartoons? Well, Pixar uses this approach in all their films. In fact, Ms. Scully tells us that there is something known as the “Pixar Pitch” which captures the formula for each of their movies and which could also be used to frame our Catholic school stories. The story should follow this progression:



- “Once upon a time...”
- “Every day...”
- “Then one day...”
- “Because of that...”
- “Because of *that*...”
- “Until finally...”

How can you put this “Pixar Pitch” formula to work to tell your school’s story? First of all, make sure you are starting where the audience is, and tell *their* story! Here’s a sample:

- “Once upon a time” a young boy was being bullied in school.
- “Every day” his bigger classmates would make fun of him, so he dreaded going to school each day and started to perform poorly in his classes.
- “Then one day” his parents decided to enroll him in the nearby Catholic school.
- “Because of that,” his new classmates reached out to him and warmly welcomed him to their school.
- “Because of *that*,” he began to make friends, enjoyed going to school, and soon his grades improved.
- “Until one day” he graduated from a fine Catholic college and began a successful career.

Every school has many, many “Once upon a times” to share with its audience in print, photos, and videos. Make sure you follow the wisdom of cartoons when you consider how best to reach your school’s audience.