

Teaching schools marketing strategy: a step-by-step guide

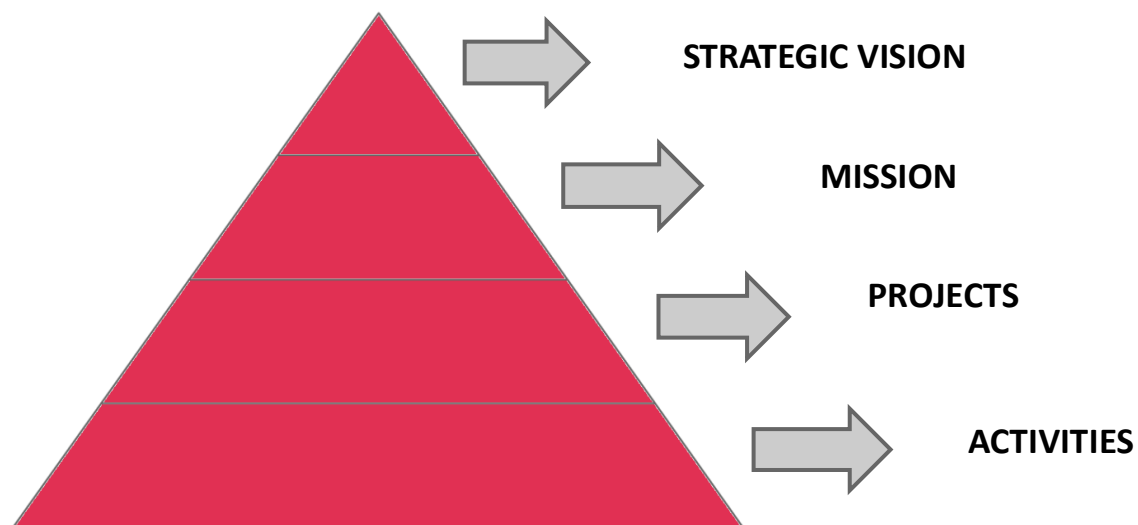
How do you begin to define 'marketing' for the education sector? In their book, *School Leadership for the 21st Century: A Competency and Knowledge Approach*, Davies and Ellison (1997) provided something we can all identify with: 'The means by which the school actively communicates and promotes its purpose, values and products to pupils, parents, staff and to the wider community.'

We could include 'services' within this definition, as more and more school leaders look to add value to their organisation and consider more imaginative ways of increasing revenue.

The real issue however is that marketing is too often thought of as a single event or as a series of actions and approaches. This causes those responsible for marketing to engage in reactive responses without a clear framework for action, resulting in an ad-hoc scattergun approach which is ineffective and uneconomical.

It is critical therefore, that any marketing activity is preceded by a coherent and carefully considered strategy, which links to the overarching school development plan.

Too often schools adopt the bottom up approach to marketing: jumping headlong into specific activities without any attempt to link them to clear objectives and strategic intent. Investing time up front on a structured marketing plan will, in the long-term, save time and effort - two resources none of us have in abundance.



The following step by step guide should be used in conjunction with the marketing plan template provided to create a strategic approach for your teaching school, highlighting individual processes and actions.

1. Executive summary
2. Situational analysis: SWOT, GAP, PESTLE
3. Internal assessment
4. Programme and activities
5. Resources
6. Reflection

1. Executive summary

The executive summary sits at the start of your document and sets out very clearly the purpose of your teaching school marketing plan, presenting the main objectives and recommendations. It also serves to remind those responsible for its implementation of the original aims and objectives, providing a useful way to reflect and record success, or otherwise.

Your marketing plan will need to ensure it addresses the six core areas of responsibility for teaching schools, as set out by the National College of Teaching and Leadership.

- **School-led initial teacher training**
- **Continued professional development**
- **Supporting other schools**
- **Identifying and developing leadership potential**
- **Specialist leaders of education**
- **Research and development**

You can use your executive summary to present an outline of the key features in the forthcoming plan, in bullet point format.

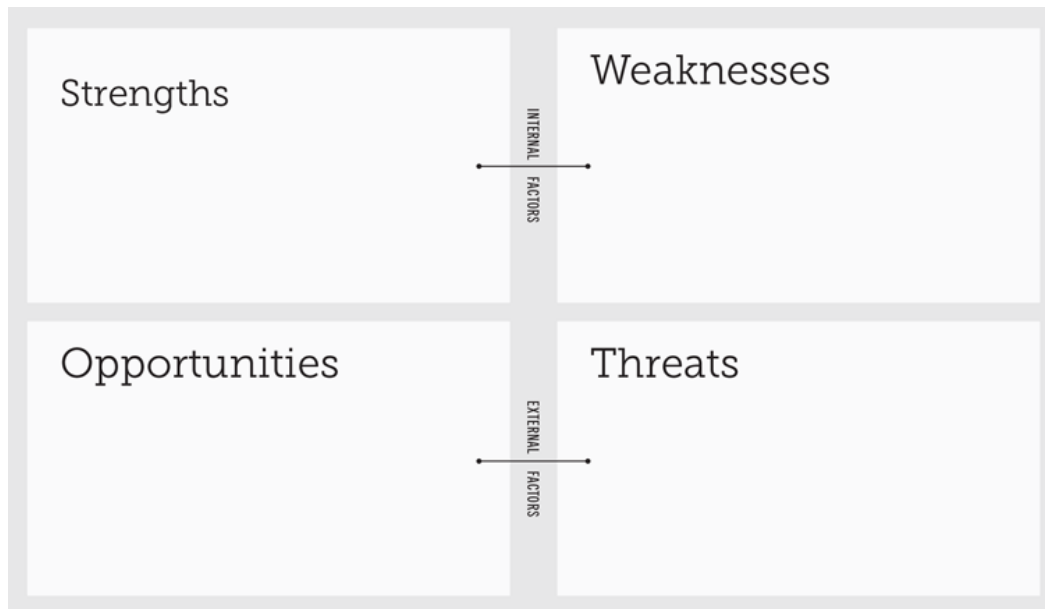
- Highlight the main features of your Teaching School Alliance (TSA) – its core objectives. Explain the rationale behind the establishment of the TS. Your TS application would have required some detailed track record evidence of sustained CPD and staff development, your plans for delivery and what relationships/partnerships you have established already.
- Reference the evidence you have to support that rationale and the resources you have to support delivery. The analytical tools mentioned throughout this guide will bring to the forefront the resources needed to support your delivery.
- Give an indication of the primary objectives and a timeframe.
- Identify your TS brand and core values. Use this process to hone those key messages and assemble a 'memorandum of understanding' or similar which can be shared with other partner schools.
- Identify your target audience. You'll need to identify priorities in your area and support under-performing schools and academies. Regional schools commissioners, local authorities, dioceses and multi-academy trusts may also work with you to support schools in need of improvement.
- Acknowledge the need for a mix of marketing techniques to deliver these objectives, including digital online (social media, website) and traditional offline (recruitment fairs/print media).

2. Situational analysis / environmental scanning

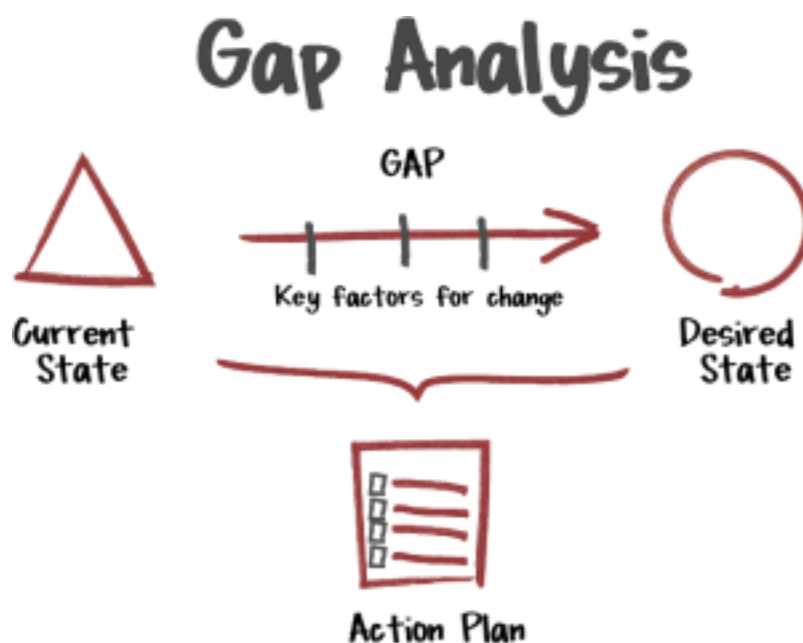
This aspect of the plan is designed to help identify your strengths and challenges. The idea is to analyse, understand and define current and future environments that the organisation will be operating within. There are a number of analytic tools to help articulate this but essentially you're

trying to gain intelligence on the external environment and your capability to thrive within that environment.

A **SWOT analysis** can help provide a critical and honest review of the status of the school, considering both internal and external factors which offer opportunity and threat to future developments. Of course you'll be looking to convert those weaknesses to strengths and threats to opportunities. Often a simple SWOT can help identify issues which can be worked on at a later date if they're not critical to the immediate success of the project.



Similarly, a **Gap analysis** can be used to determine what steps need to be taken to move from the current state to a future, more desirable state, within a given timeframe.



PESTLE: the foundations of PESTLE may lie in the business world but it is a useful analysis for framing the wider context your teaching school alliance may operate within. PESTLE analysis is an exploration of factors potentially impacting on the school, categorised in the table below.

There will be many factors pertaining to all schools, such as the new funding formula, and others that will be seen to have less immediate relevance, such as Brexit for example. Either way, if you can give consideration to these factors you're more likely to successfully navigate around them.

Trends and factors	Significance in school	Action required
Political		
Economic		
Socio-cultural		
Technological		
Legal		
Environmental		

3. Internal assessment

Here we identify and understand culture and values. The purpose of this TS marketing strategy is, in part at least, to attract other schools to the alliance so it is critical they understand and share your culture and ethos. You'll need to sharpen the vision for your teaching school so it is crystal clear and simple to disseminate to others.

Being near partner schools makes it easier to share teaching resources, good practice, CPD and facilities. However, a key factor for success is a compatible ethos, culture and sharing of values. Defining **core values** can be a cathartic and transformational process and it needn't be a complicated and drawn-out affair. You may find a mission statement is sufficient but a more visual and effective value mapping exercise can bring in the input of key stakeholders involved in your TS offering.

Keep it simple – ask small focus groups to jot down their gut feelings about your school based around four themes: relationships, functional, beliefs and emotional. These highlight key aspects of your school which make it unique: your relationships with key groups, the facilities available (functional), skills and knowledge (functional) and the key cultural drivers of your school (belief).

RELATIONSHIP	FUNCTIONAL
BELIEF	EMOTIONAL

Once these core values have been defined and articulated they can be presented in a variety of ways. Core values underpin your key messages and ought to be reinforced everywhere, from flyers and promotional banners to your website and digital communications.

Teaching schools are encouraged to work together in partnership, sharing knowledge and skills and supporting one another. [The Encompass Alliance](#), for example, distilled their values and core objectives into a 'memorandum of understanding' to be shared with other teaching schools and potential partners. The agreement defined their moral purpose, vision, shared values and organisational structure while setting out expectations from alliance member schools.

Developing those **key messages** is crucial to identify what makes your teaching school proposition an attractive one. What benefits will it offer other partner schools and their staff? Constantly ask yourself 'why' – why do we do what we do? Student results are an outcome of what you do so think about what drives your organisation and its people.

Nottingham Trent University's School of Education has contributed to a [two-year study on the impact of TSAs](#). Commitment, values, passion, resilience, hope and vision were found to be key qualities driving school partnerships. The evidence suggests TSAs are having a significant part to play in improving the supply of good quality NQTs. Messages such as this ought to be carefully packaged and presented to potential partners.

You can use your new core values to define these messages, to distil them into no more than three key features of your offer.

Key message 1 _____

Key message 2 _____

Key message 3 _____

4. Programme and activities

This aspect of the plan gives you an opportunity to list the programme of activities to help support those aims and objectives you've noted earlier, while also addressing those challenges and threats from your earlier situational analysis. We can also use this to allocate resources (financial and human) to the activity and define a timescale.

Adopting a multi-channel approach to marketing will help to reach your target audience in the most cost effective way. Our marketing mix will include a range of techniques which can be separated into the two primary areas below.

- Off line: traditional methods of promotion and marketing such as print advertising, flyers, face to face, direct delivery to potential partner school, newsletters etc.
- Online: website, digital social media outlets (e.g. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

Off line

Recruitment fayres: your school could host an information morning/fayre to invited partner schools, providing an informal platform to present the TSA concept. Alternatively you may prefer a more personalised delivery directly to an individual partner school. This works well as the school is more likely to feel confident and comfortable exploring the options more fully on their terms.

Case studies: The [New Schools Network](#) provides useful case studies highlighting the impact various TSAs have had over a wide range of measures, including school-to-school support, succession planning, talent management and leadership development. Your own staff (some of whom may be specialist leaders in education) provide great stories to attract those ambitious staff in potential partner schools.

The national picture: you'll want to link with national associations, engaging with, and contributing to, research into leadership and development in education. The Cambridge TS Network, for example, link with the Institute of Education and National College of Teaching & Leadership. These relationships and case studies provide positive exposure, helping attract potential partner schools.

Online

Website: It's vital that the TS information is easy to find and navigate. Have a clearly marked tab on the home page and make sure you keep the information current and relevant. Add case studies and success stories, keeping them punchy and brief.

If you're developing individual branding for your TSA you may feel a separate website is the way to go. The site can include downloadable and/or on-line bookings for development programmes, updates and news on the development of the alliance and, of course, evidence and impact. Within the site you can illustrate your action plan, information on governance and links to all partner schools.

Partner schools would also highlight and promote their involvement with the alliance on their websites, with links between the two.

Social media: This is an extremely useful and cost effective marketing tool. Many schools manage Facebook and Twitter accounts, so a mix of social media channels is vital. YouTube provides a way of

visually promoting your TSA offering; a short two-minute video embedded into your homepage is far more likely to engage audiences than pages of text.

5. Resources

Although teaching schools currently receive core funding to help establish and build capacity, funding beyond 2019-2020 is subject to future spending reviews. Now teaching schools receive £60,000 in the first year, £50,000 in the second and £40,000 for each subsequent year. Careful budget planning is needed to ensure adequate resources are deployed to meet the core objectives for teaching schools.

Initial set up costs will be disproportionately high, especially if you're looking to establish a stand-alone website for your TSA. Off line direct marketing costs, with branding, and development of materials and literature will be significant, but assuming you've conducted your value mapping exercise and articulated the key messages then this piece of work will only need doing once.

Once you've established partner schools in your network then marketing costs can be shared too. There is an attractiveness to sharing skills, professional development and CPD events with partners, but be mindful it works both ways – your costs should be shared too!

6. Reflection

Attempting to evaluate all our marketing activities can be frustrating and time consuming. Sometimes it's pretty much impossible and you're running on gut instinct as much as anything. That said, a big piece of your marketing mix will consist of social media and digital – google analytics will tell you all you need to know about who's visiting your website and how long they're spending on each page.

Facebook and Twitter have excellent analytical tools built in so you'll be able to understand where you're reaching out to and what impact your social media activity is having. If you've defined your audience as part of your marketing strategy then you're targeting them directly and it's easy to see how they are responding to you.

It is worth ensuring you build this reflective time into your practices – it's amazing how many schools continue to do what they've always done and are surprised with the same old results! Don't assume you need to spend vast sums on traditional media – remember you have a specific audience so directly market to them.