



The Career College Information Source

Career College Broadcast Media Commentary and Analysis

*By Cheryl Hentz with Tammy Quadrini, president and CEO of
Griffin Marketing Group*

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This is part of a continuing series of quarterly reports on the media environment for career schools.

Career Education Review: We want to focus this month on “TV Strategies for Challenging Times.” Given that the value proposition of higher education is in question, prospects are reluctant to take on student debt and tuition rates remain high, though they are frequently being discounted via scholarships. In addition, leads being generated are not necessarily being seen or being converted. So we want to offer some suggestions and strategies for schools to help them through this dilemma.



Tammy Quadrini

Tammy Quadrini: I think this is an excellent topic because I have been hearing more often, not so much from existing clients, but rather from prospective ones, that “TV just doesn’t work anymore.” I find this very concerning. I spoke with someone just the

other day that told me he “felt that TV is just a necessary evil.” And for anyone who feels that way, it is a very sad place to be. It’s a sad perspective. The

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notion that TV doesn’t work anymore is completely false. If someone truly believes that, something just isn’t right with what they’re doing. Something could be wrong with their media buy; something could be wrong with the media mix; something could be wrong with their creative; it could be any number of things. But it’s not that TV doesn’t work anymore, it’s that TV is just a lot more complicated; it takes a lot more work and it’s not as cut and dried as it used to be. For our clients spending the right budget with the right creative, it is absolutely, bar none, the A-#1 primary lead driver. That being said, there are numerous components involved now that we didn’t have to worry about before, when TV was easy and lead volume just flooded in.

CER: Well, let's talk about the issues and how schools cannot only meet those challenges, but overcome them by developing sound, workable strategies.

TQ: That sounds perfect.

Competition

From all of our evaluation, competition is still extremely fierce. School budgets have not waned off either. Many schools backed off from their advertising at the beginning of the year, likely because they just didn't feel it was working anymore. However, that didn't work, so the money's

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back on the air, making the competition a force to reckon with. Everyone is fighting for their share of voice, but with limited dollars to allocate.

Also, as I mentioned, TV is very different and much more difficult than it used to be for a number of reasons. Between cable, satellite, or whatever the delivery system, we have so many different channel options; not to mention there are several different delivery options, which makes viewership diluted, for all intents and purposes. That makes reaching our target more complicated. In addition, we're contending with so many different media vehicles that were never in play until just a few years ago—or at least not to this extent. There is so much addiction to mobile phones in our demographic that there is now a focus to push (heavy) mobile marketing, thinking that's the way to reach people. Plus, there's the social media aspect, DVRs where people are fast-forwarding through commercials, or their attention may be diverted to the iPad, Kindle, other tablet or any other different means of media. With all the different media vehicles that we never had to contend with before, that viewership is further diluted. Not to mention the underlying factor of the negative PR on the industry that is still

present. If you talk to focus groups or potential students that are within your target demographic, you still hear the same things – that the schools aren't necessarily reliable, or that they're scams. So the negative PR continues to run its course, as well. We're combating all of these things and I think the mindset that many have about TV not working, or being a necessary evil, is present because schools have not adapted to the many different challenges and changes that are necessary in order to make TV successful. We are not only competing with other schools, we are also competing for a share of voice on so many different media outlets, and we are competing with the negative press as well.

Making TV Successful Despite the Competition

I still think there are numerous components that can be addressed to "fix" TV lead volume that people aren't seeing right now. It's doable, but they have to take a very close look at many different aspects of their operation in order to fix it.

- ***Creative, Creative, Creative.*** I think there is a real lack of understanding as to how important creative is to the success of TV – more than it's ever been before, for all the different reasons I just outlined. You have to stand out from your competition and show why you're different. You have to reverse the mindset that has developed because of negative PR. So, creative has never been as important as it is today.

When I'm having new business conversations with people, I continue to be at a loss with potential clients who have no production budget per se. They just "do" production when they feel the need. So some maybe haven't done anything since 2010, or they've aired nothing but two spots over the last two or three years, and then they wonder why they're having problems. It seems so obvious to me, but still, it is a very consistent mindset that people are not realizing how important creative is to the TV issue. It has to be consistent. I would recommend a

quarterly production budget for any client, and creative that continually adapts to the changes in the marketplace.

Much of the creative I review continues to tell the same old, tired story: messages like “Find your passion,” “Work with your hands,” “Change your life,” “Hands on training,” “Small class sizes,” and so on. These messages simply are not resonating, nor are they going to. And if clients continue to use this same messaging with new production, they’re going to continue to find that TV doesn’t work for them. But again, it’s not that TV doesn’t work; it’s that they’re not keeping



A Workforce Communications Strategic Partner

Since 1995 **Griffin Marketing Group (GMG)** has been providing direct response advertising services for education clients. GMG specializes in media negotiation, placement and detailed lead analysis, and can provide production, print, telecenter and Web services, as well.

Tammy Quadrini joined GMG in 1998 and has been president and CEO since 2007. She has over 23 years of school direct response experience, starting with several small agencies, before switching to Bates USA as the direct response media supervisor in charge of ITT Technical Institutes and the Indiana Department of Tourism. Quadrini supervised the local buying for the 44 ITT school locations (at that time), as well as purchased all national cable. She left Bates to gain media buying and planning experience for Subway, Union Federal and Indianapolis Raceway Park. Quadrini’s overall media experience includes buying/planning for local television, national cable, local cable, radio, newspaper and billboard advertising.

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their creative constant, current and adapted to speak to the needs of the target demo they’re trying to reach at the time they’re trying to reach them. So have other people tell your story. Don’t show a bunch of fancy pictures of your school and tell everyone how wonderful you are. That message doesn’t work. Have others tell your story – and not actors. Have sincere, honest, real people like graduates, employees of your school, employers that you work with who hire your graduates, tell your story. Using employers is probably the most important. Let them tell people how qualified your graduates are. We are no longer in a world where all we need to do is offer training and then leave these people on their own and they can easily find work because jobs are plentiful. People don’t just want to know that they can get training. They also want to know they can get a job, a career, after they get the training.

Tell what your offerings are. Take a fresh look at your creative. Do focus groups on your creative message. Get feedback about the message you’re putting out there. Give them something to sink their teeth into. People have financial concerns these days; so if you have scholarships available that people can apply for, tell them about that. If you offer GED assistance, tell them about that.

Consistent, timely creative with others telling your story is one way to help make TV work.

- **Look at the reviews your school is getting on the Internet.** Google your school to see what the reviews of your school are. There’s a lot of negativity out there and whether it’s true or not is completely irrelevant. What matters is what’s out there on the Internet and the negative information that people are reading and what many people believe. And more often than not potential students are making decisions to not pursue your school based on what they’ve read or heard. Unpleasant as it may be, see what people are

saying and see where you can use creative to reverse that negative message. Whatever the message is, find someone to get on the air and tell the opposing story.

- **Community involvement.** This again is something that can be emphasized in your creative message. If you're a smaller to mid-sized school that is a local institution, you have local community interest and local employment at heart. You have an interest in giving back to the community through the training and the jobs that you can help fill. So brag about what you do, pointing out that you're local, rather than being part of a huge chain of schools that keep opening campuses in any miscellaneous area. Not to downplay the larger institutions by any means, but how much local, community interest and how many local, community jobs do these bigger competitors have?
- **Organic Internet Leads/Direct Call-Ins.** I think there is a great deal of discounting of how many organic Internet leads are coming from TV, as well as the direct call-in leads – calls that are made directly into the school – so they're not getting counted per se in the reporting or TV/radio evaluation. The VIPs are trying to digest what appears to be an exorbitant TV (or radio) cost per lead, but they're not looking at how many of their organic Internet leads are coming from TV or how many people are calling their school directly rather than dialing the 1-800 number. People have to be very careful not to discount those leads. We have a variety of ways to track this for our clients and we have several cases where the call-ins and Internet leads from TV represent upwards in the amount of 50 percent of overall TV leads. That's a huge chunk, so people have to be very, very careful in discounting TV and saying that it doesn't work if they don't have any sort of measurement in place to count call-ins directly made to the school and Internet leads from TV.

It's important to put on your "request information" page a section asking how they

heard about you. I am a big proponent of that. Some people disagree, believing it's intrusive and that people don't like it, but I see nothing wrong with it at all. I think it's a very legitimate question. Not every person will always fill it out and some won't fill it out accurately; but, by the same token, it is a good indicator of where at least many of your organic Internet leads are coming from. And the ones that say "TV," should be counted against your TV dollars and included in your evaluation reporting to determine accurately if TV's really working for you or not.

- **Don't rely on the media buy itself.** It used to be that if you had a pretty good media buy, pretty good analysis, and basic creative with a 1-800 number, leads came flooding in. It was just about that easy. But it isn't that easy anymore. Today, it's a real science; it's a real talent and we have to adapt to the changes. You can't keep doing the same thing and expect different results. Any amount of added value that you can secure with stations to enhance your media buy enhances your share of voice out there, which is what you want. You can do morning show interviews to brag about your school, to talk about new things or an open house, and you can also use that as a platform to counteract any negative press.

Community awareness and sponsorship opportunities should be strongly embraced. Again, they are much more important than ever before. This is a component of some very positive branding that people can do. Schools may not necessarily receive direct 1-800 phone calls out of community awareness or sponsorship initiatives, but these do enhance the direct response buy that has the call to action, the right media mix, and the right creative. Once these elements take hold, then TV results will really improve. And there are numerous opportunities to take advantage of, like: book drives; career days; open houses, which can be a great thing but they have to be done right; blood

drives; serve as a drop-off site for donations; and many more.

Capitalize on other mediums to help get the word out about these things, too, including TV, radio, Facebook, any internal marketing the school has, direct mail, email blasts...and the list goes on. For additional added value, schools should be everywhere and anywhere in association with the stations they're advertising on. That includes links and banners on station web sites. We've secured deals in which we've had added value inclusion on stations' Facebook pages – that's huge!

Something else schools should be looking at are the small penetration digital stations available in any number of local markets in which they can do PI deals. These people aren't getting weekly buys, or quarterly or annual buys. So, offer them a \$100 PI. Now are these going to bring in volumes of leads? No, but cumulatively if you have enough of them on the air, they absolutely could start to track some volume. Not to mention, if it's a PI where you're only paying for the leads, you've got nothing to lose and for every lead you get it will amortize your CPL. At the very least, even if you don't get a single lead out of it, you're not paying for it and you're getting more awareness out there because people are changing channels and seeing you. There are all kinds of opportunities out there for that but people are focusing too much right now on only the core stations.

We seem to be in the branding cycle again instead of getting leads. Certainly branding and image building are an important part of the picture, but schools should not forsake the call-to-action, direct-response buy to pay for it.

- **Radio to support TV.** Radio is really starting to show some momentum, not only in direct leads but also in tremendously enhancing the TV buy. So if there's any more money in the budget, or if TV were suffering, I would

highly recommend a radio buy to support it. Often what you'll find is the radio cost per lead seems to be exorbitant, and we've tracked this meticulously. But it does seem that every time radio is on the air, TV does better. So the media mix and all the different vehicles you can use are equally as important, and probably more important than they've really ever been.

- **Do competitive research.** Schools should take a look at what they're facing in their community and who all the players are. How many players are in your particular market,

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for example? What is your share of voice on TV? Are you at a half percent of overall school spending? Because if you are, save your money and don't buy it at all. If you're not going to do it right then don't do it. A school's agency should really be looking at this very intensely. And if they're not, the school should be looking at it. If the school doesn't have access to it, then they should find an agency that does.

There is so much that can be gleaned from evaluating competitive and what they're spending by medium. Which newspapers are they advertising in? Are they in any magazines? What radio stations are they on? Where are they advertising? And what kind of units are they buying on TV – are they doing 30s, 60s, 120s? You can also find out what kind of programs they're buying, the daypart, etc., and what they are doing on a quarter-to-quarter basis. Evaluate successful components of a buy via evaluating expenditure increases on quarterly trends...by

looking at your competitors' spend. This offers crucial insight as to potential test areas.

- **Prospects who are either not showing up for the appointment or not enrolling.** In order to evaluate this information correctly you'd have to know if the school has this data by medium. For example, many schools are still utilizing lead aggregators as a core part of their media mix. This may be a good example of prospects who are no-shows or with whom your admissions representatives can't secure an appointment. Admissions often ends up wasting a lot of time on lead aggregator leads because they talk to an inordinate amount of people who actually filled out a request for information in order to get the "free" offer for something else entirely. They didn't actually have any interest in the school. But in order to really see why prospects are not enrolling you'd have to drill down into each individual medium as to what the appointments and conversion rates are by medium. Is it a lead aggregator issue? Is it a radio issue, with placement or creative? Or a TV issue, or any combination of the above?

Another point of evaluation is: what happens on the phone calls coming into your school? One service we offer our clients is full call recording. If you've got an inordinate number of prospects that either aren't converting or are no shows, one of the best places to look is the recorded phone calls. This is probably one of the best opportunities and best places a school has to fix this issue. Are there things being said or not said in the phone calls that are causing prospects to not show up? On the other hand, is there something that's being stated in your creative message that is causing this to happen? Maybe something's being said in that message that is misleading and the school doesn't even realize it. But they can figure that out by peeling the onion and listening to the phone calls.

At the end of the day, with the right creative, the right buys, and the right media mix... ***TV still works.***