

St. Mary's School: Two-Year
Marketing Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report was created to assist St. Mary's Catholic school of Longview meet their objectives to improve brand awareness as well as increase student enrollment in the upcoming two academic school years. This report offers recommendations to improve the media aspects of St. Mary's marketing operations, as well as guidelines for execution that will help to improve the school's strategic positioning throughout the process. These recommendations are the result of thorough research pertaining to the target market and include mediums such as billboard advertising, Facebook advertising, and improved online presence.

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

Year 1 Objectives

- Increase enrollment from 218 to 350 students.
- Communicate reputation for quality to target market.

Year 2 Objectives

- Increase enrollment from 350 to at least 400 students.
- Establish St. Mary's as the top private school in Longview.
- Continue to communicate reputation for quality to target market.

MARKET OVERVIEW

Target Market

Demographic

The primary target market with household incomes in the Longview area greater than \$100,000. This accounts for approximately 12.3% of all households in the city of Longview (city-data.com). The secondary target market should be households with income between \$75,000 and \$100,000, which accounts for 9.5% of all households in the city of Longview. With Good Shepherd and Longview Regional Medical Center being the largest employers in terms of employees in the city of Longview, we believe that targeting the medical community in particular will yield the most effective results for marketing efforts.

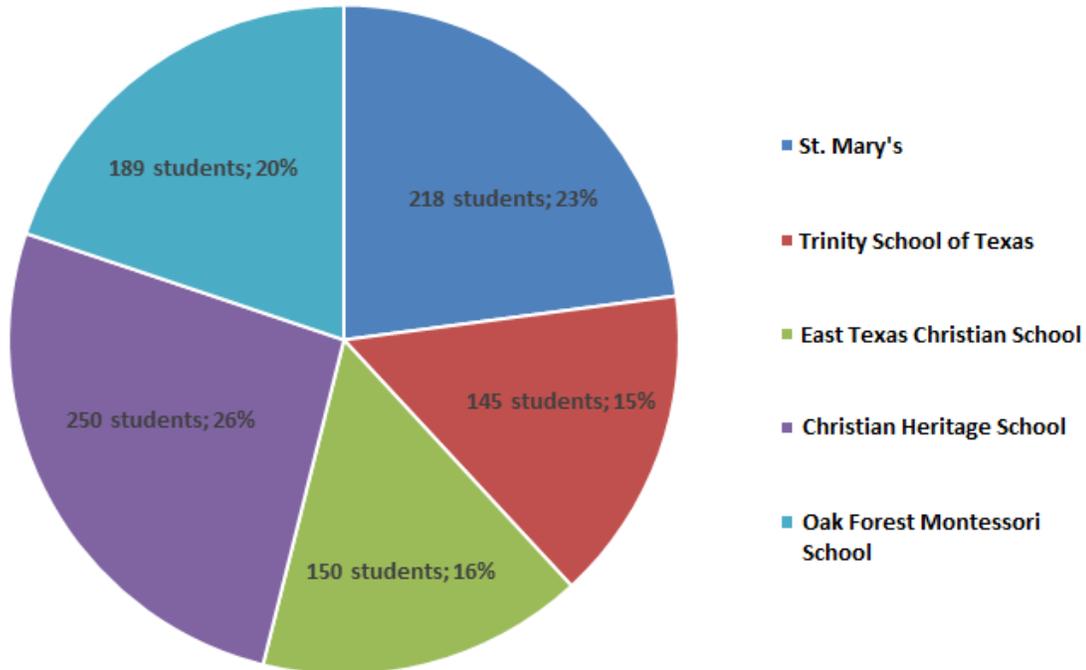
Psychographic

In recent years, the reputation of quality in public school curriculum has greatly diminished. The ideal psychographic for St. Mary's to pursue will be upper middle-class parents with one or two children who are concerned about their children's future. These parents should place a high value on education, and should hold skeptical or even negative views about the quality of education offered at local public schools. These parents many times may be "type-A" personalities who push their children to be successful and associate their children's accomplishments with their own. Another member of the psychographic could be conservative Christians who would like for their children to be kept away from the negative activities that happen at public schools.

Market Share

Fig.1

Private School Enrollment in Longview, TX



SWOT ANALYSIS

Strategic Positioning

To better help, understand, and define St. Mary's and provide different perspectives, a SWOT Analysis was conducted. A SWOT Analysis helps identify an organizations strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. By doing so, organizations can get an analysis of what they are doing right and wrong while also bringing into light aspects that may help them succeed and also highlighting competition and what to do to keep this competition at a minimum. Here is the SWOT Analysis for St. Mary's Catholic School located in Longview, Texas.

Strengths:

- A private high school such as St. Mary's Catholic School lets the school focus their attention to a specific niche market that fit a certain demographics. This allows the school to tailor its

educational and extracurricular activities around a specific group of students that allows for a more personal, unique and focused secondary school experience. A smaller student body, higher teacher to student ratio and these advantages result in more resources and technology to students.

- Private funding means that the school is free to incorporate aspects such as religion and other types of philosophies and theories which is appealing to parents and students who want to engage in these topics. For example, Catholic parents who feel their child should have a connection with God while obtaining an education would be very likely to send their kids to St. Mary's Catholic School.
- Furthermore, students at St. Mary's are more likely to take advanced classes. Studies have shown that 81% of students enrolled in private schools are likely to take an advanced science class, 70% are likely to take advanced math classes, and 55% are likely to take foreign language classes versus 60%, 39%, and 28% for public schools, respectively. Private school students are also more likely to attend college after high school with 90-95% going to college compared to just 60-67% in public schools. A NCES report reported that private students scored higher on standardized tests, and had more demanding GRA requirements. (CAPE, 2014)
- Because of St. Mary's selective process for admitting students to their school, student safety becomes increased as the students there are a select group of students who fit certain criteria. Safety for students is a growing concern especially in today's day and age but private schools are much safer than their public counterparts. A 2008 study found that 8.1% of public school teachers were threatened versus only 2.6% in private schools. The study also found that 22% of public school students experienced gang activity in public school whereas only 2.3% of private school students reported gang activity. (CAPE, 2014)
- Goals for private schools such as St. Mary's are academic excellence, spiritual life, and personal growth whereas goals for public schools are basic literacy which shows the contrast in values.

Weaknesses:

- Private schools tend to have lower enrollment in general despite business and marketing strategies used. Several reasons can lead to lower enrollments and are identified below.
- Two major contributors that lead to low enrollment and limits the target market of private schools are the fact that:
 - 1) Most private high schools are religiously affiliated which may cause skepticism in parents and students of different faiths to sending and attending religiously affiliated private schools.
 - 2) Private high schools must charge tuition because they are privately funded and thus reduces the population of potential clients dramatically as there are few people who are willing and can afford to pay for a private high school education.
- Majority of families earn less than \$50,000 a year and the average in East Texas the average household income is \$42,196 which is much lower than the national and state average of \$49,392. This takes power away from parents to send their kids to a private school and gives them less choice as to where to send their kids to school. 16% of kids whose parents earned

\$50,000 or more attended public schools compared to only 3% for those whose household income was \$15,000 or less. (*National Center for Education Statistics, 1997*)

- The Catholic population in East Texas accounts for only 10% of the entire population of East Texas also limits the client base because of the relatively small population compared to other metropolitan areas. (*city-data.com*)
- Only 20% of all students are sent by their parents to attend private schools.
- Private school teachers tend to be less educated than their public school counterparts with 59% of public schools teachers holding a bachelor's degree compared to only 52% for private school teachers and 42% holding a master's in public schools compared to only 30% in private schools. (*National Center for Education Statistics, 1997*)
- Private schools also take no public funding and all musts must come from private sources which can limit the resources available if the private school faces challenges in obtaining funds which can affect the quality of education and programs sponsored by the school. Private schools may have more liability because it is privately operated.

Opportunities:

- Since only about 20% of all students attend private schools, St. Mary's has the opportunity to expand to the rest of the student population and this is particularly advantageous in increasing enrollment.
- St. Mary's must take this opportunity to work closely with the community such as churches in the area, small businesses, non-profit organizations, and other institutions that may help them bring awareness to the school. This will also allow St. Mary's to help out the community and give them a positive image.
- Being privately maintained, St. Mary's can take advantage of this private ownership with new and unique features to the school that other schools might not have.

Threats:

- Other private schools in the Longview area pose a threat to St. Mary's in the sense of direct competition because of the similarities in operating and education.
- Other public schools can also pose a threat because of the free education, non-religious affiliation, and acceptance of all students.
- Government rules and regulations that are sanctioned on private schools can sometimes limit their potential. Agencies such as the Office of Non-Public Education (ONPE) can regulate how private schools carry themselves. (*State Regulation of Private Schools, 2009*)

While conducting this SWOT analysis, we have repeatedly discovered that one important aspect that must be taken into consideration is the fact that private school education appeals to more of a niche target market that focus on households of Catholic faiths and who have an annual household income of over \$100,000. By focusing on this niche market, St. Mary's can implement the best marketing strategy on this demographic group. This will save time, money, and be effective as St. Mary's will be

going after a niche market segment which can confuse the marketing strategy as well as make them difficult to implement.

PROMOTION & ADVERTISING STRATEGY/EXECUTION

Building and Maintaining Online Presence

Website Design

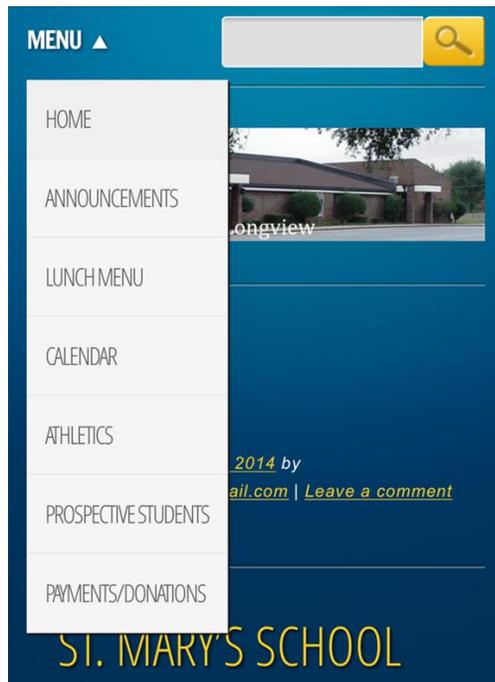
With the growing use of the internet, the public increasingly associates the quality of a business with how that business presents itself online. Although the current St. Mary's website is useful, a new and sleek design will improve the St. Mary's image for quality and thus help facilitate enrollment for the school.

Fig. 2



With a content management system such as WordPress, designing a website is easy to do and does not require programming knowledge or experience. It can be installed on any server, and there are many tutorial videos online that demonstrate the installation process and how to customize themes. One of the greatest benefits of using a content management system such as WordPress is that it allows users to modify the design of a website quickly and with very little effort. We recommend using a WordPress theme that implements the use of gradients rather than a background image in order to give a more uniform appearance. Figures 2 and 3 provide some concept ideas we believe will work well with the site. We also recommend using the site banner as the only large image on the site; this will improve user experience by greatly reducing the time it takes for the site to load. Reducing the number of links on the menu bar will help users navigate to the areas of the site that are the most trafficked and which St. Mary's feels are most important. A vertical navigation sidebar can then be used for links that are essential, although less used.

Fig. 3



Many WordPress themes have preinstalled mobile-optimized sites, which enables users to better navigate the site on mobile devices. With members of the target market working in a fast-paced industry, we recommend choosing a WordPress theme that is bundled with a mobile-optimized site so that they have the opportunity to interact with the school on the go.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

There are two basic areas of SEO which web marketing should focus on: on-site SEO and off-site SEO. Each one has its challenges but both are important to increase rankings for search queries. Each search engine looks at hundreds of signals to rank websites for each query.

On-site SEO

Search engines use bots to crawl websites to index them to return relevant content when a user searches using a keyword. It is important to include the keywords relevant to St Mary's objectives. If a web page is to show up in Google for "private schools in Longview Texas" then some variation of the keywords should appear on the page. The image below shows how many times the keyword "school" show up on stmaryslgv.org and how search engines see the word.

Fig. 4



Below is a screenshot of how many times the keyword “private” show up on stmaryslgv.org. There are other ways which search engines can tell if a page should rank for different keyword even if the keyword does not show up on the page. We will cover how in the off-site SEO section.

Fig. 5.



Search engines are smart and can tell if there is overuse of keywords; it does not provide the best user experience if a keyword is used and does not make sense.

Keeping websites updated with fresh content is important because it is another signal for search engines (*The Moz Blog*). Because it is almost impossible for one webmaster to contribute one quality page a day many sites use Content Management Systems (CMS), such as WordPress, for their blogs. WordPress is an open source product which is easy to install on any server. Most hosting providers have an easy to set up process which requires no programming knowledge. Below is an image of content Google has found on stmaryslgv.org since the beginning of 2014.

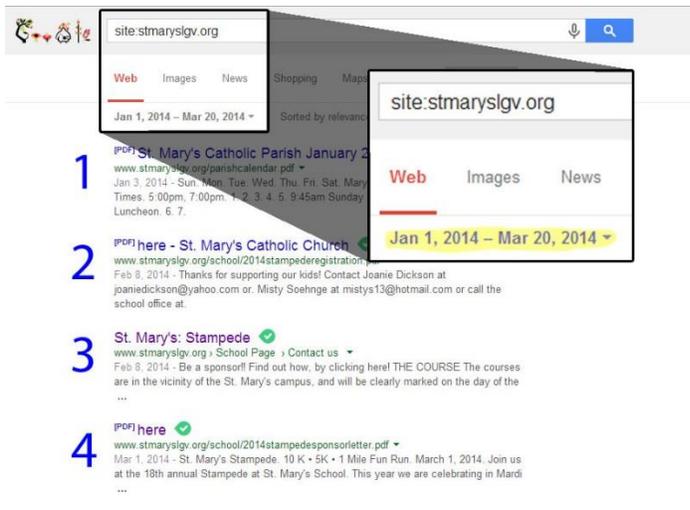


Fig. 6

It is recommended that St. Mary's install WordPress on its server since it is easy to add multiple users who can update the site with no programming knowledge. WordPress will help keep the content fresh and improve rankings for current search queries.

Off-site SEO

Managing what is on the St. Mary's website is not enough to improve rankings in search engines. Search engines care what other people are saying about St Mary's.

The easiest way to see what the web is saying about St Mary's is to look at links pointing to the website. If somerandomedomain.com is linking to St Mary's with anchor text "best Private school in Longview" then search engines see this as a vote for St Mary's to rank higher for those various keywords.

There are many tools available to find links pointing to any website. An easy and free resource is Google Webmaster Tools. It will not show all links pointing to St Mary's website, but it will show links that Google sees.

Google wants organic search results which means it does not want webmasters to go a buy links to game the system; however, Google expects businesses/organizations to participate in normal business activities such as sponsoring events. Many non-profit organizations will place a link to sponsor on their website. Sending a newspaper an article about events happening at St Mary's with a link to the event page is also an expected activity.

Social Media Analysis

The following is an observation of the current Facebook page of St. Mary's Christian School.

Upon visiting St. Mary's current Facebook page, the group was very impressed for the most part. St. Mary's online presence seems to be on the rise. However, there are some suggestions we would like to recommend for your institution to increase traffic on your page. First, it is recommended that St. Mary's post more than twice a week. We noticed that prior to a couple of weeks, items were posted once a week. As can be seen in in St. Mary's Facebook data analytics, the more often the school posts, the greater amount of visits the Facebook page receives. We understand that St. Mary's may not have events weekly, but posts of friendly news articles or Christian quotes may capture followers' interest. In addition, St. Mary's may even consider ideas such as daily crosswords or coupons and discounts to Facebook fans. In the social media world of marketing, content and consistency are key ingredients to cultivating and attracting followers. The description section of Facebook plays a great role catching visitor's attention. The following is an example of a revised description of St. Mary's Facebook page.

St. Mary's Catholic school is a landmark Christian Institution located in Longview, Texas that provides students grades K-12 with the opportunity to reach academic success in a positive Christian atmosphere. We at St. Mary's believe that every child of God has a purpose. As a collective body, we pride ourselves in aiding our children with the necessary tools to ensure them a successful future. We instill in all our students the importance of having faith, discipline and moral integrity. In addition, we offer a variety of advanced courses and extracurricular activities that will ensure your child has the necessary skills to reach their God-given potential. Here at St. Mary's we guarantee SUCCESS. Safe, unique, credible, Christian education, for striving students.

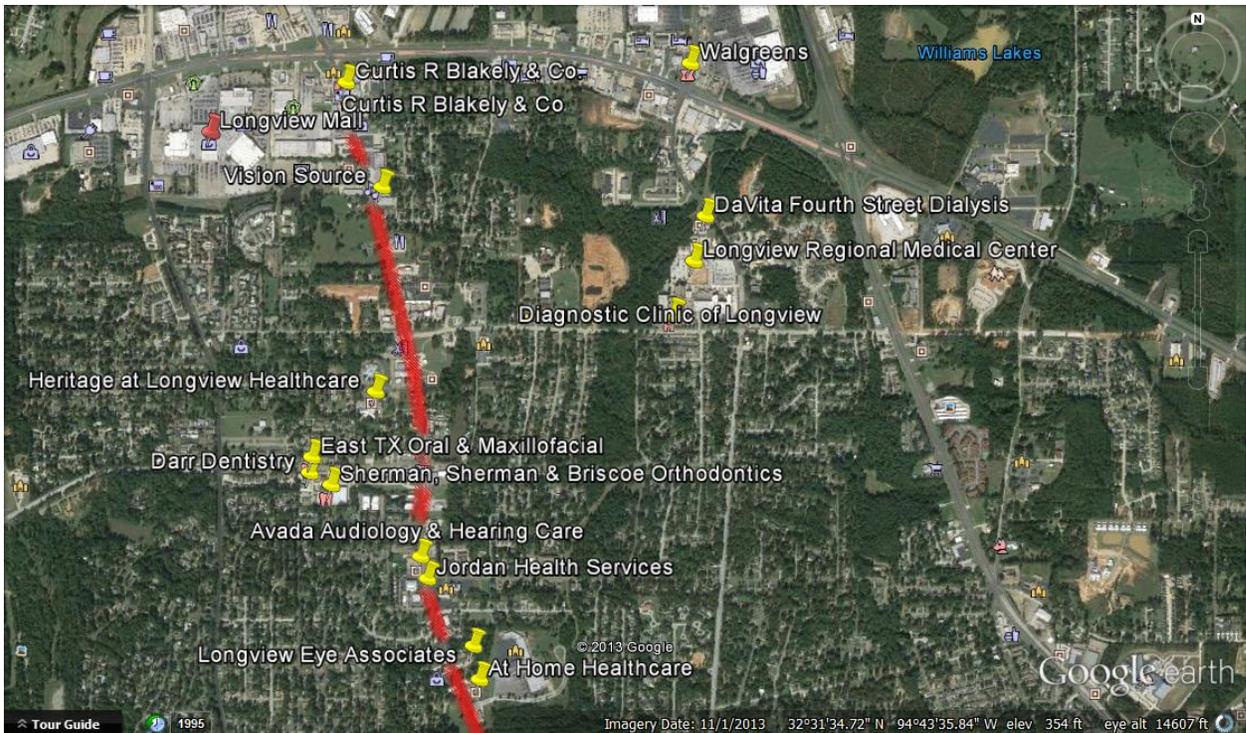
Advertising on Facebook

Facebook in recent years has developed into one of most viewed and accessed sources of social media around the world. Facebook has become the hangout destination for many parents. Facebook is a great tool that can be used to establish brand awareness. In hopes of increasing enrollment at St. Mary's, Facebook could play a very significant role. Advertising on Facebook is very easy, but requires numerous steps in order to be effective. As you can see on the illustration provided below, creating an ad has many steps. You must remember when creating an ad it is important to narrow down your viewing audience. Sections such as location, workplace, and age are some of key areas of interest. The group recommends St. Mary's to focus on an area within a 10-50 mile radius. In addition, due to the cost of attending a private school it is recommended St. Mary's advertises to individuals in the area that have an annual income within the range of \$40,000 - \$100,000+.

Billboard Campaign

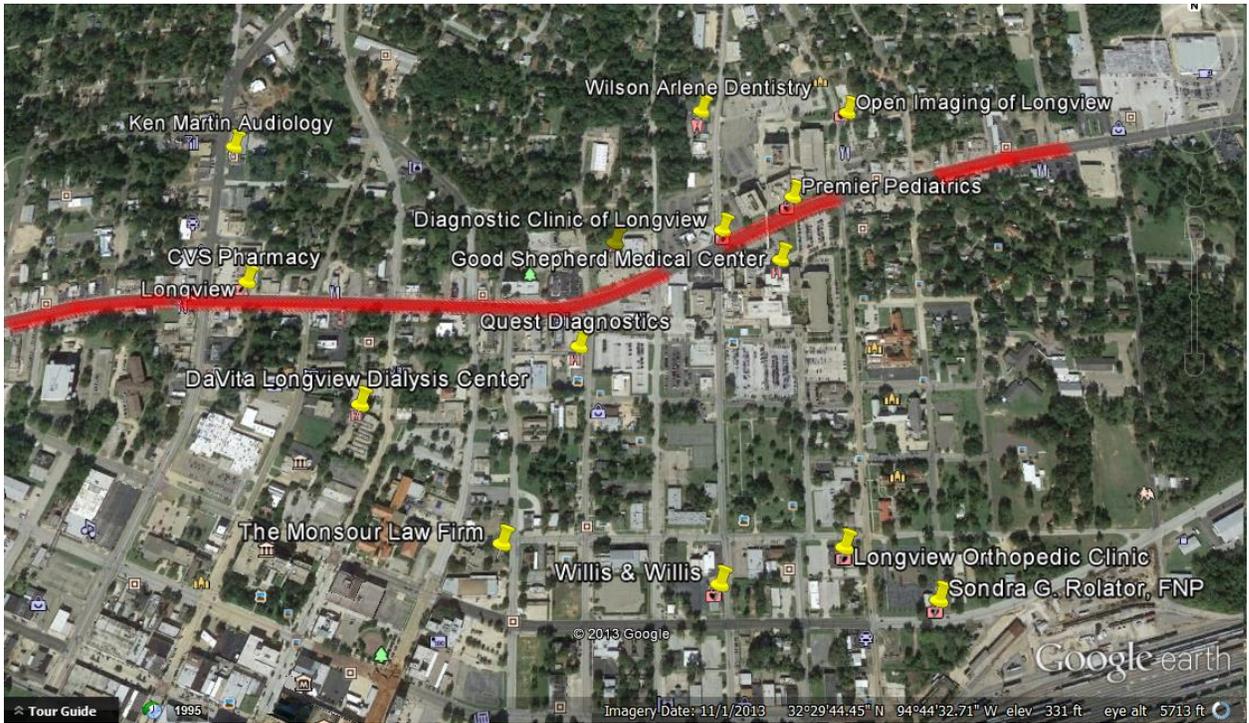
Billboards can be a very effective means of building brand awareness. For this reason, it is recommended that Billboards be strategically placed in locations along Highway 80 near downtown Longview and on Judson Road. As can be seen in figures 7 and 8, placing the billboards in these locations will be optimal because these are the places trafficked most heavily by members of the target market as they commute to work. Good Shepherd Medical Center and the Longview Regional Medical Center are the largest healthcare employers the city of Longview, which are also located near these roads. With the largest employers of the target market located in these areas, placing billboard ads within these vicinities will yield the highest possible return on investment from marketing dollars that are allocated to the billboard campaign. Figure 7 refers to the suggested locations for billboard advertisements along Judson Road. The roads highlighted in red in both figures are some of the most highly trafficked roads in the Longview area. Besides medical professionals and other members of the target market, these roads are also used by members from surrounding cities who commute to Longview in order to shop and see family. This is yet another way marketing dollars allocated to the billboard campaign will be optimized.

Fig. 7



Highway 80 also looks to be a promising location for the placement of billboard ads. As can be seen in Figure 8; although less concentrated with businesses in the medical profession, Highway 80 is still one of the major routes that medical professionals use during their commute to work. Additionally, Good Shepherd Medical Center is located along Highway 80 which employs approximately 3,600 medical professionals (*city-data.com*). This will optimize exposure the ads, which in turn will maximize impressions per marketing dollars.

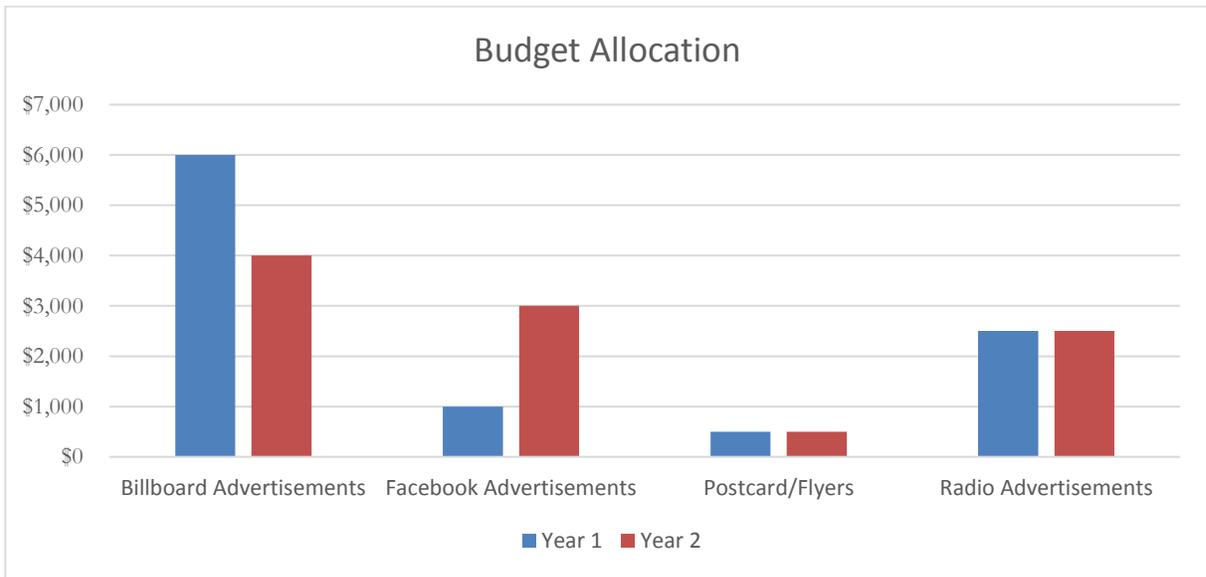
Fig. 8



BUDGET ALLOCATION

Based on the group’s research, it is recommended that St. Mary’s allocate a \$10,000 annual marketing budget in accordance with the graph below. Although budget estimates may change, the graph below can still be useful by using the same proportions as the current budget.

Fig. 9



The budget was designed with accelerated first-year growth in mind. As the school's brand awareness increases within the Longview area by means of heavy billboard advertising, the school will be able to cut back on marketing dollars allocated to the billboards during the second year. The second year will have an added focus on retaining and engaging parents of newly-enrolled children by means of Facebook advertisements. Other aspects of the budget will include implementing radio advertisements and continuing the use of a postcard campaign. The budget allocation for these aspects of the plan will remain the same during both years.

SUCCESS METRICS

- Increase enrollment to 350 students by the fall semester of 2016.
- Improved brand reputation throughout the Longview, TX area.
- Increased Facebook likes to 500 by the fall semester of 2016.
- At least two of St. Mary's School's web pages on the first page of relevant Google Search results by the fall semester of 2016.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the group believes that this marketing plan will serve as a useful guide for St. Mary's as the school seeks to increase enrollment during the next two years. By placing billboard ads in strategic locations along Judson Road and Highway 80, improving the school's online web presence through the adoption of a new and sleek website design, improving search engine rankings, and Facebook advertisements, the group believes that St. Mary's will be in a favorable position to meet its enrollment goals for the upcoming two school years.

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