In the previous issue of I&P, we introduced the three spheres of influence. This article focuses on the sphere dedicated to **Market Position**. Following articles will highlight the other two spheres—School Culture and Constituent Relations.

In ISM parlance, “market position” consists of components and stances meant to convey who you are as a school. Ideally, your competitive niche reflects the ways in which your school is uniquely different from your competitors. The market position sphere of influence uses two ISM tools—Price, Process, Product and Purpose and Outcome statements. These act as foundations for a school’s success in recruiting new students and families, representing a mission-based, student-centered, “inside-out” approach to enrollment marketing.

As the Admission Director or Marketing Communications Director, you know that effective internal marketing generates a clear, consistent message reliably communicated and understood by parents, Board, faculty, staff, and administrators. It uses these same tools to validate delivery of the experience promised during the admission process. First a school must evaluate its competitive marketplace stance or focus. Then it can develop or refine a set of Purpose and Outcome statements, and create the foundation on which to build a robust marketing communications plan that validates the school’s value proposition. This affirms in the minds of parents they have made the right choice of school for their families, inspiring the long-term enrollment commitments you seek.

Clarity as to the school’s market position has strategic financial planning implications for the Board and operational implications for the school’s administration and faculty. Your market position is primarily expressed in your suite of Purpose and Outcome statements, comprised of the school’s mission and two other foundational market assertions—your description of students (Portrait of the Graduate) and your faculty (Characteristics of Professional Excellence). Your Purpose and Outcome statements represent the common purpose to which all adults pledge commitment. That common purpose should underwrite all operational plans and decisions—and become the standard measuring your performance.

The highlighted factor positioned at the end of the list in the sphere represents the primary anticipated outcome from a careful evaluation and alignment of your interests in the other factors.

The components of your market position include:
- your marketplace focus, or stance, as differentiated by ISM’s taxonomy of private-independent schools: price/accessibility, academic product, and process/individualization;
- your Purpose and Outcome assertions—your mission and the way you describe your students and your faculty;
- your competitive niche—how your school fits in (and expresses its primary differentiating proposition) among competitor schools in your immediate marketplace; and
- your market demographics—representing the availability of a pool of mission-appropriate students and families who are able and willing to pay your tuition to have the experience you describe and promise.

The outcome of a strong market position, when well-articulated, monitored, and managed, is that your school will emerge as an influencer in the marketplace.

All private-independent schools are “niche” institutions. Knowing your marketplace stance and emphasizing that stance at all points—internal marketing, external marketing, parent education, faculty hiring and evaluation, attention to ratios—can only strengthen your strategic position.

---
