

Benefits of an Online Store for Your School and Athletic Department
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Running a profitable and efficient school store is a difficult and time consuming task for any individual assigned to this job. School stores in our county school system usually sold many varieties of school clothing, numerous “Junk food” items, school supplies and other items determined by the school administration which rarely made a profit when the final accounting was done at the end of the school year. The time spent on completing the inventory and financial report for the auditor required countless hours and occurred at the same time that the athletic director was trying to complete the athletic financial report and order equipment for the upcoming year.

A solution to this problem came about four years ago when Colonel Zadok Magruder High School was selected by the Montgomery County Public Schools to pilot an online school store linked to our school website. This effort would supplement and eventually replace entirely the current school store program which was losing money or barely breaking even on a good year due to “Junk Food” being removed from the store due to the lack of nutritional value as mandated by our board of education. The time needed to man the store was also a problem since it required an individual to be available before, during and after school on a daily bases which meant I could not deal with other issues and duties.

A company from Bellevue, Washington was selected after interviewing several companies nationwide and various concerns and questions about how the online store would work were resolved by the chief auditor, business consultant, principal, online store manager and the president of the selected company. As in any pilot program that involves a high school of over 2000 students, problems and concerns did surface, but they were quickly resolved. Some concerns in the initial set-up of the online store included:

- Refund policy of items
- Dispersal of funds from the vendor
- Payment if credit cards were not available by customers
- Accurate records of sales
- Ability to add products
- Design of website and store

This year the program has expanded to several additional middle and high schools in our county school system with more expressing interest in the benefits of the program as an additional way to reach out to the community while saving time and money. The agreement lasts for a year with all parties being able to terminate the agreement if they are dissatisfied with the program in any way. A contract is signed by all parties at the start of the program with specific terms being able to be negotiated as desired. Each school can determine the profit margin they wish to receive from items sold and how they would like the design of the online store to look and operate from their website.

Several problems were eliminated using the new online school store which had existed before. The expense of capital that was invested in clothing inventory which may or may not be sold during the school year was always a problem. Time spent on ordering and keeping accurate inventory and financial records for the auditor at the end of year. These problems were solved by having parents and students order directly from our online school store and have the items shipped directly to their home by the supplier. The school receives a statement directly from the company along with several checks which can be deposited in predetermined accounts at the school. As the store manager, I simply deposit the checks in the appropriate accounts in our business office every two months. The company breaks down the checks into subcategories which allows the accounting process to become simple and efficient for our school.

Ordering is done by clicking on our online school store link found on the main page of the school website. (www.magruderhs.org) Individuals who have access to the Internet can order items twenty-four hours a day from the store and most orders are shipped within seven days. This has led to tremendous growth of our internet sales due to the convenience it offers to customers. Individuals have the option of paying for items by credit card or check, thus relieving the school from handling countless transactions and deposits at the finance office. The online school store sponsor is able to track sales daily by using a special password set-up with the company.

Much of the apparel can be customized by simply clicking on different icons which allows for a personalized touch. Selections include color, size, logos, embroidery, style, and countless other combinations which would be expensive or impossible to offer the customer in the typical school store. The items are then shipped directly to the customer's home, thus relieving the school from handling and dispensing the items to the appropriate buyer. We did have an online bulk order for sweat shirts and physical education uniforms in the fall which were delivered to the school. The customers selected their size and paid online for the bulk order. The order was filled in bulk and sent directly to the school, which saved on shipping and handling charges and the items were distributed before school from the athletic director's office.

Another unique item that we offered through the online school store is the selling of season athletic passes. In previous years, the athletic director had to collect orders, deposit money or checks daily at the finance office, make and laminate passes, and then distribute them in school or mail them home in a timely manner. Using the online system, season passes are only sold online and then shipped by Certified Mail to the customer within two days of the order being placed. Needless to say, this program saves the athletic director valuable time to work on other tasks while also increasing apparel sales since people often buy additional items as they visit our school's online store.

Prom tickets were another item sold online last year and this practice will continue again with a few modifications. The program allows juniors and seniors to buy up to two tickets only and the sale closes when the predetermined number of tickets is reached. The company prints the tickets and sends them to the athletic director for distribution two weeks before the event. Students come to the athletic director's office

during predetermined hours to pick-up their tickets. The student's name is checked versus the master financial obligation list to make sure they don't have any financial obligations owed to the school before they receive their tickets. Individuals can order online using a credit card or send an order form with a check to the company. Once orders are received, their names go on the master list which is used when passing out tickets and checking in individuals at the event.

A few negative drawbacks to the online system include the fee charged for the various services. Each cash transaction for tickets, passes, etc has a set fee determined by the company. Also, when students order apparel, the inability to try on different sizes and models can cause certain difficulties. Finally, not everyone has or is comfortable using a credit card when ordering online for safety and security reasons. We have tried to eliminate some of these concerns by having fliers available for all transactions so individuals can pay with a check but even in today's fast pace world, we have parents who would rather pay in cash for items rather than a credit card or check.

This system reduces the number of people selling tickets which helps reduce errors and again saves time for the financial secretary who does not need to worry about hundreds of deposits being made during a short time period for one single event. A single check is sent directly to the school within a few weeks which allows for all bills to be paid and the financial report to be completed prior to graduation. Not only can the school store handle athletic season passes, apparel, graduation videos, senior banquet, prom, homecoming dance, dinners, etc., which have all been done at Magruder High School, but items such as daily planners, workbooks, fees, etc., are potential things that the store can handle which would free secretaries, teachers and administrators' time for other tasks that they must handle each school day.

Buying online is becoming more popular nationwide and solved countless problems that our school faced daily. Profits from the store have been used to help purchase a new message board for the front of the school and a new scoreboard in the main gym. The online school store has not eliminated all headaches from handling merchandise, tickets, and other items but it has made the entire process more manageable and gives another potential solution for a school.