

## Have You Claimed a Mountaintop? They're going fast.

Mountains are imposing structures. Their strength and permanence are awe-inspiring. They create barriers to passage, but at the same time they inspire us to climb. The successes and failures of mountain climbers teach us that to reach the top you need not only the right skills and tools, you also must account for your strengths and weaknesses and have a plan.

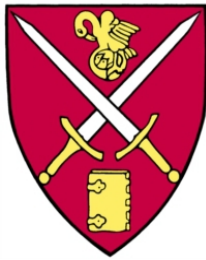
### Claim Your Mountaintop: *Stand For Something And Be Known For It.*

It may be surprising to some that, even in a tight economy, certain institutions flourish. Enrollment remains strong; annual giving keeps pace; capital campaigns meet and surpass their goals.

### How Does This Work? *In the same way that mountain climbers conquer mountains.*

Best-in-class schools know themselves, their strengths and weaknesses (real or perceived), and the types of students and donors they wish to attract. They find a way to distinguish themselves to meet their goals. It's not necessarily that they're the best in academics; academic excellence might not set them apart from their competition. But they are best in class at *something* that is persuasive to the right mix of parents, prospective students, alumni and donors. And when these schools identify that one thing—their mountaintop—they align communications, experiences and even their curriculum around it, all leading to new heights of effectiveness. They own a mountaintop, and they have a plan.

### Standing Out When Your Competitors Are Outstanding: *St. Paul's School*



Consider St. Paul's School. St. Paul's is respected worldwide for academic excellence, but so are the others in its peer group of elite boarding schools. St. Paul's asked, If academic excellence is a given, what else could be compelling enough to make our school the number one choice for the types of students and parents that would be the best fit for us?

St. Paul's hired **edwardsco.** to create a communications strategy that would broaden its base and allow the school to compete more favorably among its strong peer group. Our first job was to help St. Paul's claim the *one* mountaintop that makes them distinctive among their competitors. Although many internal stake holders were skeptical about developing a singular message about St. Paul's ("How can we reduce a place so complex and rich into one message?"), a comprehensive process of knowledge-gathering (conversations with students, faculty, staff, alumni and prospective families), competitive research revealed their mountaintop. "Freedom with Responsibility" conveys St. Paul's distinctive philosophy of giving students room to make choices and experience the consequences—good and bad—of their choices first-hand. It's a philosophy that only St. Paul's can claim within its elite peer group. They own that mountaintop.

The idea has been widely embraced. It resonates with parents who believe, like St. Paul's, that children develop into strong adults by learning from their mistakes and celebrating their successes. It speaks to prospective students eager to find their own way. It works for the faculty and staff, who want to teach knowledge, wisdom and independence—with guardrails.

"Freedom with Responsibility" is the foundation for St. Paul's enrollment, institutional planning and development efforts. Using "Freedom with Responsibility" to guide its admission strategy, and armed with materials developed by Edwardsco. based on their mountaintop, St. Paul's recently had the two best admissions years in its history.

**Will the world run out of mountaintops for educational institutions? We doubt it. Most schools have a distinguishing characteristic that, if communicated persuasively, will give it strength, permanence and a barrier to passage against competitors.**

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