



IS IMAGE STILL EVERYTHING?*

If students have never heard of you, they will not enroll in your classes.

That simple statement undergirds the importance of an institutional image. Recognizing that your image is your most important marketing asset, this White Paper will address, at a strategic level, the major issues a president must consider as he or she contemplates the creation of a strong institutional image. It will conclude with an outline of a basic image enhancement plan.

"Image is Everything."

It seems like just yesterday since we wrote those words, but we know it's not. A great deal has changed during the last decade. Certainly the competition for students, donated dollars, and public attention has increased. The Web was but a glimmer in Al Gore's eye 10 years ago. Any discussion of brands was nascent. And, now that we are a decade wiser, we thought it would be interesting to revisit that original topic and pose the question again: Is Image Everything?

DR. ROBERT A. SEVIER

Senior Vice President, Strategy

MR. ERIC SICKLER

Principal Consultant

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMAGE

We know that parents, particularly parents who themselves went to college, are extremely reluctant to send their sons and daughters to a college or university which they do not perceive to be of high quality or prestige.

We also know that major donors and foundations will likely not support a school that is unknown to them.

Interestingly, there is a corollary here: alumni giving goes up when name recognition increases.

In fact, there is almost no way that you can overestimate the value and importance of a strong institutional image. You may call it a brand, or a position, but the idea

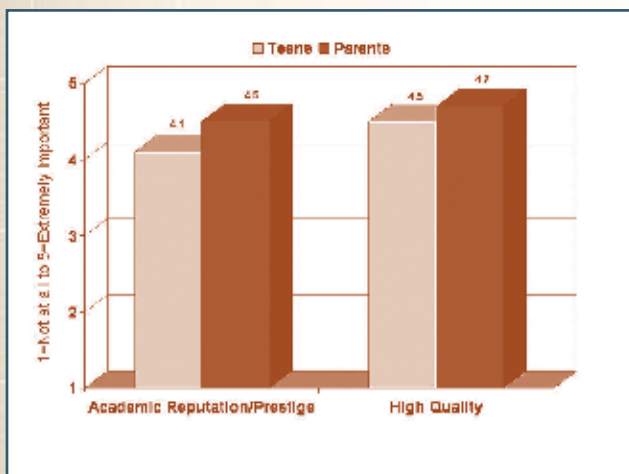
is the same. If you are not in the minds of prospective students and donors, they will not be in your classrooms or on your donor rolls.

Of course, this begs the question:

If images are so important, then why is it that so few colleges and universities have undertaken the systematic creation of a valued institutional image?

Consider these five basic reasons for many image failures:

1. **An inconsistent appreciation of the institutional importance of a strong, valued image.** Few senior administrators understand the high correlation between having a strong, pervasive image and success in student recruiting and fundraising. Of course, lip service is paid to the importance of an image, but when faced with a recruiting or



*This is the 10th anniversary of our first White Paper.

Indicators That You May Have a Weak Image

While there are a number of factors that might indicate you have a weak image, the following are especially indicative:

- *Inability to reduce your discount rate (a high discount rate is a basic indicator of an image that is not valued by your constituents)*
- *Inconsistent or generally poor alumni giving*
- *Higher-than-average cost to recruit a student and raise a dollar*
- *Poor response to announcements of open positions*
- *No sense of strategic direction*
- *Poor morale*
- *Poor retention of better students, faculty, and staff*
- *Lack of consistent constituent support*

The Three Most Important Words of All

It is imperative that the words and phrases you use to describe yourself (your image) must be highly valued by your internal and external target audiences. In all instances, they must find these words and phrases, and the messages that convey them, to be:

- *Important*
- *Believable*
- *Distinctive*

*These three words combine to form the most critical word of all: **relevance**. And if your target audiences don't think you're relevant, they likely won't think of you at all. Remember, they—not you—ultimately decide whether you are relevant or not.*

fundraising failure we almost always analyze the tactical issues rather than the strategic ones. We worry about the logo, the color of the search piece, or whether or not our Web site includes a virtual tour. In doing so, we fail to consider whether the correct image was established in the minds of students...and donors *a priori*.

2. **A failure to do the research that will define and support a legitimate point of differentiation.** All colleges describe themselves as friendly, caring, and supportive. And perhaps all are. While these attributes are important, they are not distinctive. Highlighting them merely sends the message “We are just like the other schools you are considering.” It is much like BMW or Volvo saying, “Yes, our cars have four tires.”
3. **An unwillingness to focus.** A strong image requires focus. This need for focus flies in the face of popular—but incorrect—thinking that to be successful, a college must do more for more people in more areas. Building a strong image means being known for something, not everything. It is all about focusing on a certain kind of student to serve, a certain way of teaching, or a certain target geography.
4. **An unwillingness to commit the necessary resources.** Just as you would spend a generation designing and executing a facilities plan, the commitment to building a strong image must be long-term. It will never happen in one budget year. It will require a commitment of time, talent, and treasure.

5. **A lack of coordination and commitment to integration.** Strong institutional images require an institution-wide commitment to coordination and integration. This means everyone—VPs and deans, the athletics department, the advancement and continuing education offices, even the president's office—works from and supports a single plan. This coordination is essential. If you don't make sure your messages are integrated, they are—instead—disintegrated. Instead of a symphony, you will have cacophony.

IMAGE, BRAND, AND POSITION

This White Paper is about understanding the importance of, and taking the steps to build, an institutional image. Before we proceed, however, we want to briefly discuss three similar terms:

- Image
- Brand (or brand promise)
- Positioning statement

Your image is how you are perceived by your most important audiences. Images are about perception.

Importantly, your image is the leading edge of your brand. It is what people think of when they think of you.

Your brand promise includes your image, but your brand also directs how you deliver on what you promise. In other words, your brand is your promise. Your entire organization must be committed to delivering on that promise.

At Stamats, we use a four-step process to help our clients build a blockbuster brand that faculty, staff, students, and donors will value and support:

- Make a brand promise that matters.
- Communicate your promise (this is the image part).
- Live your promise.
- Strengthen your promise.

While marketing purists may cringe, for all practical purposes your brand, brand promise, and positioning statement are largely the same thing. They focus on answering this question: when someone hears your name, what do you want them to think?

Again, this is the image that is created in a person's mind, and it is this image that precedes, even predicts, the larger brand experience you offer to your stakeholders.

A QUICK LOOK AT INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

As you may know, IMC is a comprehensive, coordinated, institution-wide effort to communicate mission-critical messages in ways that target audiences notice, understand, and respond to. In other words, integrated marketing communications is all about developing and communicating relevant messages that get noticed.

If you strip away the terminology, integrated marketing communications has three broad functions: brand marketing, direct marketing, and constituent relationship marketing.

Brand marketing has a simple goal: to create awareness in the minds of your most important target audiences. Brand marketing is concerned with building your image and increasing name recognition among prospective students, donors, and other important audiences.

Rather than creating awareness, direct marketing has a different goal: to generate response. Most colleges and universities, no matter how large or small, apply their direct marketing efforts to two activities: recruiting and fundraising. Their goal is to get students to apply and enroll, and donors to consider and contribute.

Constituent relationship marketing requires us to know, remember, and address the perceived needs and expectations of our constituents as efficiently as possible, so we can retain their loyalties.

As you think about your brand marketing and direct marketing efforts, remember that direct marketing efforts are always, always, more effective when they are preceded by effective brand marketing. More students will enroll if the right students are aware of you prior to a student search.

Let us give you a vivid example, using Ford Motors, of the relationship between brand marketing and direct marketing. Brand marketing is Ford telling people that "Quality is Job 1." Direct marketing is Ford asking you if you want to buy a Taurus. Ford will sell more cars if their direct marketing appeal—"Want to buy a Taurus?" has been preceded by a targeted, robust brand-building campaign—"Quality is

Job 1." In the same manner, you will recruit more students and raise more dollars if your recruiting and fundraising strategies are preceded by effective brand-building.

QUALITY—REAL AND IMPLIED

Before we launch into our discussion of how to build a valued image, it is critical to mention that it does little good, and is in fact profoundly unethical, to create an image of quality that does not exist. Students and donors will eventually find out and the harm you will do to your institution in trying to deceive them may well be irreparable.

BUILDING A VALUED IMAGE

Image management begins by accepting the fact that your most significant institutional asset is image. You may well have great academic quality; you may well offer an exceptional undergraduate, nontraditional, or graduate experience. You may be the end all to be all. But if you are not known for these qualities—if you do not have this image—it is, largely, for naught.

Image management recognizes that an institution's image must be refined and projected so that when people hear your institution's name, they immediately have a clear idea of who and what you are about.

ROMANCING THE BRAND

David Martin calls this aspect of image management "romancing the brand." In his book by the same title, he writes that "brand mystique accrues by

projecting a consistent personality over time. . . . Your creative selling message must build awareness of the brand and of its special advantages over a period of time. It must sustain this awareness so that the brand will be remembered when the need arises.” Martin goes on to use an illustration from David Ogilvy:

Did you ever notice that Winston Churchill was careful to wear the same ties and the same hats for 50 years—so as not to confuse us? Think of all the forces that work to change the personality and image of the brand from season to season. . . . What guts it takes, what obstinate determination, to stick to one coherent creative policy, year after year, in the face of the pressures to “come up with something new” every six months.

Many colleges and universities have adopted Churchill’s strategy when they consistently use their mark and color palate.

IMAGE MANAGEMENT AS A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Image management is both proactive and aggressive. It presumes a commitment to your environment and audiences that may be more accurately measured in generations rather than years. It means investment now with a sometimes long-term payoff. It is management by the numbers and not by institutional wishes and admonitions. It is—in its most complete and full sense—management.

ANTICIPATE THE BARRIERS TO MARKETING

Before you can begin to build and manage your image, you need to be aware of a few potential obstacles that may be ahead. We know from experience that image initiatives sometimes fail because they do not anticipate the barriers to marketing that exist on many campuses. Some of these barriers include:

- **Prime motivators are missing.** If stakeholders do not feel threatened, or if the institution does not need the resources offered by emerging opportunities, it is unlikely that there will be enough consensus for building a strong image.
- **No top-down commitment to image-building.** If the president or chancellor and board don’t aggressively support the initiative, it will fail. And remember, this support will involve a budget.
- **An ill-conceived belief that strategic problems can be solved tactically.** The strongest image on the planet won’t save a flawed, dated, or moribund curriculum.
- **An unwillingness to address issues of territoriality.** Comprehensive marketing and image-building efforts are just that—comprehensive. If the chief academic, advancement, student services, and enrollment officers are not willing to share goals and resources, then the marketing effort will be seriously impaired.
- **A reluctance to undertake a realistic situational analysis.** Images are built on reliable information. A legitimate

environmental audit, assessment of educational need, institutional self-study, and perception and positioning studies must be undertaken.

- **A confusion between the needs of stakeholders and customers.** Stakeholders—faculty, staff, administrators, and others—are people who work for and support the institution and its mission and vision. Customers are the people who pay the bills (donors actually have their feet in both camps). It is the job of the organization and its people to serve its customers. By meeting their needs, resources will be gathered that will support the needs of the stakeholders as well.

STEPS TO IMAGE MANAGEMENT

Image management is a six-step process that begins with a set of philosophical orientations and concludes with the actual writing of an image-enhancement plan. In all cases, the success of your plan will depend on how well you address the first five steps (among those outlined below):

1. Assure top-down buy-in
2. Begin with strategy
3. Organize for action
4. Budget realistically
5. Evaluate your current image
6. Write and fund an image-enhancement plan

STEP ONE: ASSURE TOP-DOWN BUY-IN

It is no coincidence that institutions with strong images are almost always institutions with a strong leader who is willing to invest in a strong image. In all cases, this leader must have a clear appreciation for the value of a strong image and be willing to make a series of important investments.

This first investment involves time. The leader must be willing to invest time in articulating the image issues that must be addressed. Second, the leader must invest dollars. When it comes to institutional images, as it does to many things, commitment is spelled with a dollar sign. And third, the leader must invest political clout. Because the many variables that affect an institution's image cross so many departmental and divisional lines, turf battles can only be avoided when the decision is made and enforced from "on high."

If image management doesn't have the active and aggressive support of the president or chancellor and the senior administrative team, it will become bogged down. Strategies will not be coordinated. Activities will not be sustained. Messages will be mixed. And budgets will not be efficiently used. In short, the image will not be managed.

STEP TWO: BEGIN WITH STRATEGY

An image is not created out of whole cloth. It is the public presentation of your vision and strategic plan. As such, it must be long-term, enduring, and endearing. If your strategy is fundamentally off-target, a strong image will not help. In fact, a

strong image will actually draw attention to your strategic failure and likely hasten your demise.

Every image or brand communication plan that Stamats creates begins, by necessity, with a review of your mission statement, vision statement, and strategic plan. These are the anchors of your image plan. Without them, you will be adrift.

STEP THREE: ORGANIZE FOR ACTION

Most institutions have their image-enhancement strategies far too decentralized. Publications report to one administrator, media relations to another, and advertising to a third. No one knows what the alumni office is up to, and athletics won't attend any planning meetings. There is no sharing of goals. No internal coordination. No pooling of talent. There is, in short, the potential for very public chaos.

If you think about your own institution, it is likely that these individuals do not report to a single administrator, nor do they work from a single plan. The image implications of this lack of coordination are potentially catastrophic. To solve this problem, we suggest that you organize your marketing communications functions and those who benefit from a single, strong image under one senior administrator.

Given the opportunity and a blank slate, we would suggest the following fundamentally structural changes which address two overarching objectives: first, to build a strong, valued image. And second, to coordinate the activities of those individuals—student recruiting and

fundraising, to name a few—who would benefit from this strong image.

Our suggestion is radical and will no doubt ruffle many territorial feathers. However, we are still thinking strategically—what's best for the institution with less concern about what's best for individual administrators who may be a bit turf-conscious.

This reorganization is our first choice. However, many of you will find this change either impossible or too costly to undertake. In that case, look at the philosophical underpinnings of this model. Its purpose is to share goals and resources. Regardless of your organization, the degree to which you can share goals and resources may well spell the difference between an institution that is successful and an institution that is marginalized. A president once said, "When you don't have the cash, you better have the conversation."

STEP FOUR: BUDGET REALISTICALLY

Many college and university administrators think it is a lack of dollars that undermines their ability to develop a strong image. Actually, this is seldom the case. More often, it is poorly used or coordinated dollars that are the real culprit. Again, it is the need for integration and everyone working from one plan toward one goal.

As you can see from the table on page 6, the dollars required to build a strong image rest significantly on your institution and its marketing environment.

Recognizing that different institutions will approach the budget issue differently, we assembled a list of budget strategies for you to have. As you consider data, remember the two cardinal rules of image building:

- Don't spend a single minute writing an integrated marketing plan before the budget issue is addressed.
- Don't develop a plan you cannot sustain over the long run.

BUDGET STRATEGIES

One of the most problematic aspects of image management is budgeting. Institutions often don't know how much to budget. While there are no absolutes, here are some guidelines to consider.

First, develop a **common vision** among key administrators and

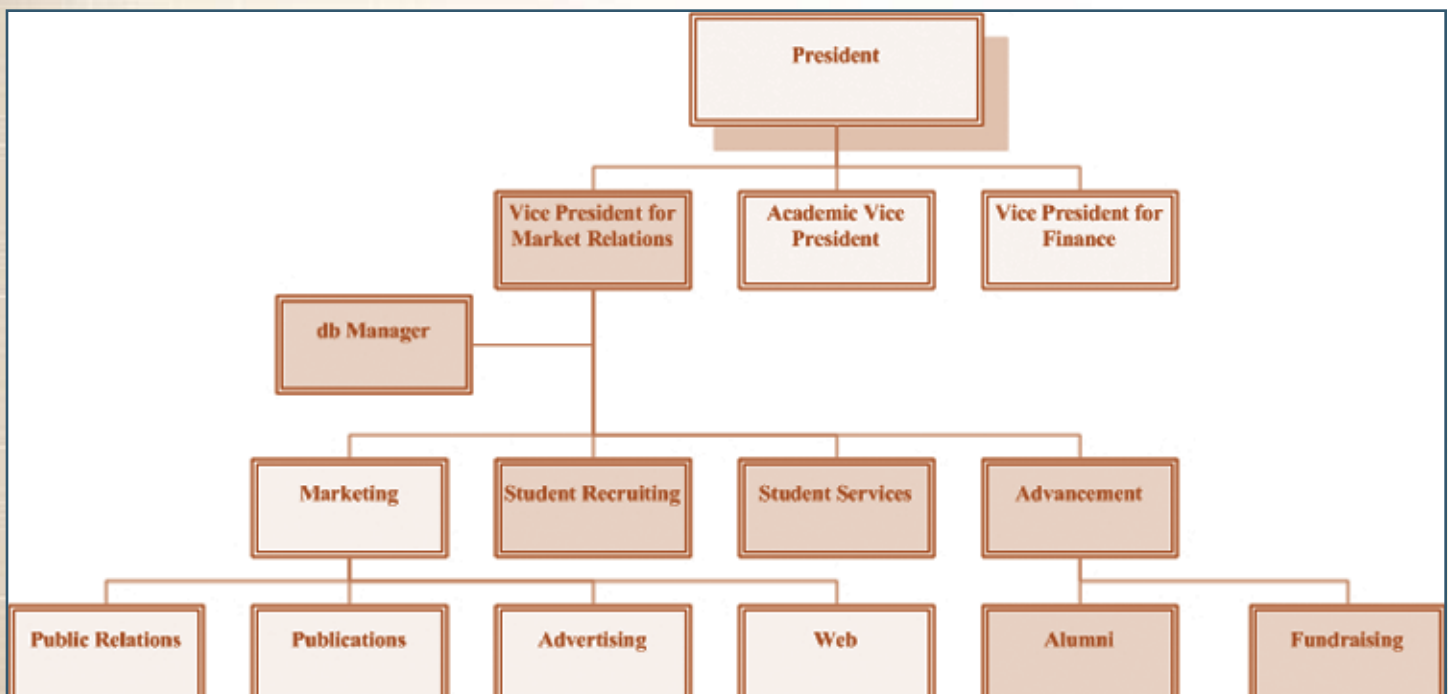
campus leaders for integrated marketing communications and its role in image-building. When the leadership is in sync on the vision, you are more likely to get buy-in on both goals and the means to accomplish them. In addition, there is a greater likelihood for synergy among key players.

Second, remember to focus on **integration**. It is not new money that will fund your plan, at least not in the long-term, but the reallocation and coordination of existing money. Think about this for a minute and you will see the logic. You are already spending significant dollars from several budgets across campus on image-building. Rather than spending more, coordinate what you are already spending. Again, when the vision is shared, resources are more likely to be shared.

Third, actively **involve your CFO in planning and budgeting**. We are big believers in having the CFO on the planning team. We have discovered that when the chief financial officer is involved at the outset of the planning process, he or she will be more likely to help you find new and reallocated dollars to support the plan. Most CFOs are very attracted to the idea of stewardship and return on investment (ROI). You will be surprised at how big an ally your CFO can be.

Fourth, **centralize your image-building** expenditures, especially those expenditures that relate to integrated marketing communications, under one administrator. Earlier, we reviewed one way in which a market-oriented college or university might be organized. While this type of organization may be seen as a brash move for some colleges and

As you can see, the model links all of your marketing (image-building), recruiting and fundraising (the folks who benefit from a strong image), and student services under one administrator.



universities, the concept of centralization should not be. Currently, far too many colleges and universities give far too many senior administrators far too much leeway when it comes to their own individual or departmental marketing activities.

Fifth, **don't create a budget you cannot sustain.** There is nothing more wasteful than launching a marketing plan with a big public blitz only to see it quickly disintegrate into a very public fizzle. This is the big reason why it is dangerous to use one-time dollars to launch your plan. It may sound like a good idea—to get an initial bang—but it almost never works in the long run. Chances are the money will run out before long-term impact is created. If your goal is a five-year plan (and that's a minimum plan length), make sure you have the necessary dollars to support that plan for each of those five years.

For those of you who appreciate a good rule of thumb, here are two **30/70 rules** to help guide your budgeting process. If you use new dollars to help fund your marketing efforts, limit those new dollars to no more than 30 percent of total marketing expenditures for each year. This forces you to use institutional dollars to sustain the remaining 70 percent of the plan. Not only is this sound fiscal policy, but it is an indicator of overall commitment. Of course, if you have set aside money from a gift that will literally fund the plan for five years, that's another issue. Eventually, however, the cost of your campaign will need to be assumed by your operational budget.

At the same time, use 30 percent of your marketing dollars to build the institutional brand and the remaining 70 percent of the dollars to fund direct marketing efforts.

Next, **hire good people and turn them loose.** To save money, colleges and universities often hire inexperienced people to create and execute their marketing strategies. This is false economy. Although you may save on salaries, the mistakes, missed deadlines, and lost opportunities will cost you dearly and publicly. I strongly recommend biting the budgetary bullet and hiring people with experience. The knowledge and understanding of seasoned professionals, not to mention the ability to stand eyeball-to-eyeball with tenured faculty and not flinch, will make these people a bargain. Of course, when you hire seasoned veterans, be sure to support them. Give them the dollars, staff, authority, and autonomy they need to do the job.

As another strategy, work hard to establish **measurable marketing goals.** Clear goals that are measurable imply clarity of thought. This kind of focus is always at the heart of a successful marketing strategy. Furthermore, measurable goals are more easily managed. Indications of progress or lack of progress are obvious. A goal to improve an image is important, but vague. A goal of improving top-of-mind awareness among prospective students with an ACT of 25-28 within a 200-mile radius from 16 percent to 20 percent is much more measurable.

Will Require More Marketing Dollars

- *No strategic direction*
- *Overly-political marketing committee; committee is too large*
- *Weak champion*
- *Lack of coordination/integration*
- *No baseline data*
- *More target audiences*
- *Larger target geography*
- *Contested position*
- *Less-valued position*
- *Complex position*
- *Highly competitive marketplace*
- *Expensive media market*

Will Require Fewer Marketing Dollars

- *Strong or well-known athletic program*
- *Narrow focus and reasonable goals*
- *Smaller target geography*
- *Smaller number of target audiences*
- *High degree of coordination and integration (everyone working from one plan)*

Budget Strategy Guidelines

1. *Common vision*
2. *Integration*
3. *Involve your CFO in the planning and budgeting*
4. *Centralize your image-building*
5. *Don't create a budget you cannot sustain*



- 30% new marketing dollars; 70% existing dollars
- 30% on brand marketing; 70% on direct marketing

Building Reputation

Drawing from Dominic Brewer, et al. through In Pursuit of Prestige: Strategy and Competition in U.S. Higher Education and adding some insights from Charles Fombrun's Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image, we learn that there are six avenues through which colleges and universities might work to build a reputation. They are:

1. **Academic quality—high selectivity.** *Harvard may never consistently field a No. 1 football team, but it can consistently field the best students in the country.*
2. **Academic quality—faculty research.** *The quality and amount of faculty research are a significant reputation builder. Not only does great faculty research attract other great faculty, but it also attracts great money and the attention of the media and other reputation builders.*
3. **Big-time sports.** *If you think about the colleges and universities that sell the most branded apparel, you will*

(sidebar is continued on the next page)

Finally, remember that as your marketing strategies begin to have an impact, you can begin to **slowly scale back the commitment of resources.** For example, you might place a positional ad as part of a

larger campaign in each issue of a regional magazine for the first year, and then place only half that number of ads (every other issue) during the second year. Once your position is established, it takes less effort to maintain it. Like a flywheel, it takes more energy to get it going than it does to keep it going. Again, use baseline data and longitudinal study to judge the effectiveness of your campaign and guide the allocation of resources.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST IMAGE BUDGET WASTERS OF ALL

From an image-building perspective, the biggest waste of resources will likely be the dollars you spend on advertising. The fact is, very few colleges and universities receive an appropriate and calculable return on their advertising investments. Oddly, it's not because they spend too many dollars, but because they spend too few.

Advertising is one of the few tactics that if you don't do enough of it, you are better off not doing any at all. Funding half the plan won't get you half the results. Advertising doesn't work that way. You need to fund the whole plan to move the needle. Since most colleges and universities can't fund the whole advertising plan, resist the temptation to fund only part of it.

Here's our recommendation: before you spend a dime on advertising, especially traditional media, hire a credible media planner to develop or review your advertising plan. Let them know the dollars you have available. Seek their advice as to whether or not this is a good use of these dollars. Don't ever ask your ad agency or your ad buyer to write or approve your plan. They make their money selling advertising and have an inherent conflict of interest with their clients. Likewise, don't rely too heavily on media sales representatives to influence your advertising plan... they work on commission, too.

Remember, special events, public relations, media relations—even direct mail—are more likely to build your image than any single ad campaign, especially an ad campaign that is not supported by special events, public relations, media relations, and direct mail.

A final word: don't spend a single minute writing an integrated marketing plan before the budget issue is addressed. Save yourself, your peers, and ultimately your institution the heartache of yet another planning process that is long on good intentions and short on the means to breathe new life into them.

STEP FIVE: EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT IMAGE

As part of managing your image, it is critical for you to determine how you are already perceived. However, in their haste to set about improving their image, many institutions skip this important step. In other words, they

start the journey uncertain about their point of origination.

To help give you a better sense of where you are, we suggest that you evaluate your image along three dimensions:

- Determine how you are perceived by the primary audiences
- Evaluate how the institution projects editorially and environmentally
- Learn how your institution is compared with its cohort group

PERCEPTION STUDIES

Determining how you are perceived by key audiences is relatively straightforward. This two-step process involves first identifying your most important external and internal audiences and, second, conducting image and perception studies.

Remembering that images rest in people's minds, it is important to make sure you are regularly talking to the right people. For most colleges and universities, this involves:

- Prospective students and their influencers (parents, advisors, coaches, guidance counselors, etc.)
- Donors, including alumni and others
- The media
- Faculty and staff
- Trustees, Regents, or other oversight groups

Of course, your particular circumstance may dictate other audiences. The key is to talk to them regularly and pose such questions as:

- How do you perceive us?
- How do you compare us with other institutions?
- Which of our messages matter most to you?
- What parts of our message matter least?
- What important messages are not being communicated?

If you know the answers to these questions, you are well on the way to laying the foundation for a stronger image.

Determining how you are perceived by primary audiences is an important beginning. Next, you have to evaluate how you project yourself editorially and environmentally.

EDITORIAL EVALUATION

An editorial evaluation addresses your formal, written, image-building mechanisms, including publications, the Web, advertising, direct mail, signage, etc. A realistic appraisal of these media is extremely important because it is through these mechanisms that most institutions project their image.

An editorial evaluation addresses not only what you say about yourself, but how you say it. It seeks to answer such questions as:

- What is our short- and long-term vision for the institution?
- What institutional image do we wish to project? What data suggests that our audiences value this image?

(continued from previous page)

discover that all of them are either football or basketball powerhouses.

4. **Image-building.** *The consistent use of a comprehensive integrated marketing communications strategy will help build a strong local, regional, and even national image. This is especially true if the strategy utilizes an enriched media array rather than just one or two media (see following section).*
5. **Co-branding.** *The marrying of your name with another, perhaps more prestigious, name of particular interest to a target audience is often used to help build reputation. This point is reinforced each year when colleges and universities scramble for their place on the U.S. News & World Report lists or when the University of Washington seeks to enlarge and publicize its ties with Boeing or Microsoft.*
6. **Endowment.** *\$500 million in the bank tends to help support a strong reputation.*

Of the six options above, most colleges and universities will likely have the best success with strategies that focus on image-building and/or co-branding because these two options are generally the least expensive and most immediate. They are, however, also the most transient and easy to duplicate by your competitors. A true, long-lasting reputation can take generations to build and should involve as many of these six options as possible.

Types of Competing Institutions

Category A Competition

Students accepted at both institutions will usually elect to attend the other institution

Category B Competition

Students accepted at both institutions will usually elect to attend your institution

Category C Competition

Half the students accepted at both institutions will enroll at your institution and half will enroll at the other institution

- What are our institution's communication priorities?
- Do our communication efforts reflect the needs and expectations of the target audiences?
- How much time/budget/talent do we allocate to priority audiences?
- How and when do we evaluate the effectiveness of our current communication strategies?

ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Next, you must evaluate how you project yourself environmentally. In other words, you need to take a look at how your campus looks. I call this the "brick and mortar syndrome." It works like this: if you look good, people will assume you are good. If your campus is well groomed, if your signage and way-finding is clear and consistent, if your buildings and windows are clean, people will assume that your entire campus is well-managed. But if you do not tend to your campus, people will wonder what else has been ignored. It is simply amazing how many institutions have forgotten how important it is to wash their windows and sweep their walks.

COMPARATIVE EVALUATION

The final element in your image analysis is determination of how you are compared with competing institutions. A comparative evaluation is important because most students (and donors) don't decide between attending your institution or not attending college at all. Rather, they decide between you and another

institution. So understanding who these other institutions might be and determining how they compare with you makes extraordinary sense.

When we consider a college's competition, we like to work with three different kinds of overlap schools. Assume, for this discussion, that a student has been accepted into your institution and one other. If the student always elects to attend that other institution, this is a Category A competition. On the other hand, if the student always elects to attend your institution, this is a Category B competition. And finally, if the student decides to attend your institution half the time and the other institution half the time, this is a Category C competition.

Institutions should seek to **preserve their edge with Category B institutions and should temper their efforts to win their share from Category A institutions** as any gains will be marginal and will only come at great cost.

Rather than focusing on Category A institutions, colleges and universities should **concentrate their image evaluation and enhancement strategies on Category C institutions.** This is where they will have the greatest chance to increase their share.

To determine how you compare with Category C institutions you need to go back to the list of primary audiences. This entails asking prospective students, for example, how they compare you with other institutions on key dimensions such as:

- Academic quality
- Image
- Reputation
- Career planning

In particular, make sure to determine how you compare on the key college-choice issues that matter most to prospective students and the key giving issues that matter most to prospective donors.

WRITE AND FUND AN IMAGE-ENHANCEMENT PLAN

Stephen Blum reminds us that planning is the organization of hope. In other words, plans help us more effectively do things we have already decided to do. Plans and planning, however, seldom generate desire.

It is not our intention at this point to go through each step in the creation of a viable image plan. Rather, we will present an outline of the plan's major components. Those interested in more detail are encouraged to take a look at Bob's latest book, *An Integrated Marketing Planning Workbook: A Step-by-Step Planning Guide*.¹

As you look at the planning outline presented below, remember that the key decisions on who you are and who you want to serve should have been articulated in your strategic plan.

Image plan outline:

- **Define target audiences:** The small handful of audiences in whose minds you are trying to build an image.

- **Define target geography:** The primary geography in which your target audiences live.
- **Develop image/positioning statement:** What you want to be known for (again, your audiences must find this statement to be important, believable, and distinctive).
- **Develop vivid descriptors:** The words and phrases that you want your target audiences to think about when they hear your name. Vivid descriptors are directly derived from your image or positioning statement, form the basis of your promotional messages, and are expressed editorially and visually.
- **Action plans:** Specific plans that describe the activities individuals on your campus will undertake to build an awareness of your vivid descriptors in the minds of your target audiences.
- **Calendar** (or timeline): What will be done, when—with an emphasis on the first year.
- **Budget:** Dollars that will be spent. These dollars must be sustainable over the long haul.

If you do not have these components, you do not have a plan. You may have hopes and dreams, but you will not have the vehicle that will allow you to achieve them.

As the president, your job is to empower and support the planning process. This includes designating a qualified leader, providing financial resources consistent with the image

goals you have established, addressing internal issues of territoriality, moving the planning process forward, and assigning clear accountability. Of course, as president, you should also expect results and hold all assignees responsible.

EXECUTE AND EVALUATE

There are two basic reasons for evaluating a marketing program. First, to provide data for modifying and increasing the impact of programs in progress; in other words, to make mid-course corrections. And second, to evaluate the effectiveness of completed strategies so you can adjust ongoing plans.

The original research you conducted to help guide goal development will again prove invaluable because it contains baseline data against which you can evaluate your plan's effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Each day, thousands of high school students around the country choose colleges and hundreds of donors make gifts. And as the data suggests, most of these students and donors make their decisions based on their perception or image of an institution; an image that was established well before the decision to attend or give.

The fact is, all educational institutions in the United States have images. But images can be strong, weak, poor, or ambiguous. Is your image accurate? Is it consistent? And perhaps most importantly, is your institution's image

¹Available through www.strategypublishing.com.

valued by prospective students, donors, and other audiences?

Smart, aggressive, well-administered institutions don't leave their image up to chance. They look at their image as one of their most (if not the most) significant assets, and they build and manage that asset very carefully. They prioritize audiences. They conduct market research. They establish clear-cut goals. They write a plan. They support that plan with adequate resources. They execute. And they do this because they have learned that perhaps, in the final analysis, image is everything.



CASE STUDY: OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY

Institutional image management has always been a high priority for

Oglethorpe University, located in Atlanta, the nation's ninth-largest media market.

But like most colleges and universities across the nation, the recent influx of aggressive new online and "satellite campus" competitors in greater Atlanta has made mindshare among prospective students and prospective donors a more elusive target than ever before.

"We've come to recognize the need to make sure our marketing team is strong, informed, unified, and focused on a shared vision for the future of Oglethorpe," says President Larry Large. "And we know that it is essential for our integrated marketing plan to connect seamlessly with our institutional strategic plan. It takes

discipline to ensure that these two key plans remain fully synchronized."

To that end, Oglethorpe's integrated marketing team—which includes faculty, staff, and trustee representatives—recently engaged in a series of planning workshops to assess critically the level of integration of the current marketing programs and to ensure that all strategies, tactics, and messages are consistent with the University's mission, vision, and strategic plan. The undertaking began with a comprehensive review of market research completed on behalf of the University over the past two to three years. Upon identifying a need for more detailed information about the choices of admitted students who elected to enroll elsewhere, President Large commissioned a comprehensive study of non-matriculants to better inform the work of his marketing team.

Vice President for Enrollment Management David Rhodes and Executive Director of Marketing and Public Relations Rebecca Whicker co-champion Oglethorpe's integrated marketing initiative and strive to keep the campus community tuned in to the broad view of the University's marketing landscape. "It's very easy for busy people to get focused on their corner of the world," Rhodes says. "But given our challenges, it is absolutely necessary for everyone on this campus to understand and support where Oglethorpe has come from, where we're going, and how we're going to get there. The president and our trustees have endorsed a strategic plan and vision, and that's what gives our marketing effort a clear focus."

"Through the research we've done, we believe we have a good understanding of the Oglethorpe brand in Atlanta and throughout the South," Whicker reports. "Like almost any school, though, our visibility varies from area to area depending on distance from the campus. Rather than attempting to fund an unreasonably expensive national brand-building campaign, we've come to recognize that our greatest potential exists in developing what we're calling a 'super-regional' presence."

But when your campus is located in one of the nation's most expensive media markets, even local visibility advertising is extraordinarily pricey. For this reason, Oglethorpe's brand marketing plan relies heavily on innovative public- and media-relations initiatives. Likewise, recruitment programming for traditional- and non-traditional-aged students capitalizes on the value of building strong relationships with feeder high schools, community colleges, and area businesses.

To break out of the blur among competing institutions, Oglethorpe embraces innovation and creativity in the execution of its recruitment and marketing campaigns. An exciting new series of recruitment publications will provide the creative platform for a full-scale institutional brand marketing campaign designed to enhance Oglethorpe's visibility among target audiences, bolster an already-strong sense of community on the campus, and lend support to the University's aggressive fundraising program.

"Marketing is an essential component of contemporary higher education," Whicker continues. "Internal marketing is as important—and often as complicated—as reaching all the vital external audiences. While some people are more overtly engaged than others by virtue of their job descriptions and assignments, the fact remains that we all have a role to play in the marketing that supports our mission."



**CASE STUDY:
BRYANT COLLEGE**

Perhaps it is President Ron Machtley's astute political acumen, or

simply good common sense, that causes him to celebrate the mission-critical role of the Bryant brand every day. In 1996, Machtley accepted the presidency at Bryant College near Providence in Smithfield, Rhode Island, following a successful stint as a U.S. Congressman. At the time, the school's brand was "a bit adrift," according to Executive Director of College Relations Ed Sevilla. "The president quickly recognized the need to do something to create a campus environment that would support aggressive fundraising and morale-boosting initiatives, and he recognized that it all should begin with a focus on the mission of the institution, which would enable a clarification and strengthening of Bryant's institutional brand for our key audiences."

Machtley chose to build upon what he characterizes as "an incredible platform" of key marketing decisions made by his predecessors, namely moving the campus in 1971 from its land-locked location in downtown

Providence to a rolling 400-acre tract near Smithfield, and electing to earn AACSB accreditation to bolster the quality and reputation of the business school's curriculum.

"We'd always been focused on students, trying to make them successful, so it made sense for us to formalize this into our institutional mission," Machtley explains. "When I first arrived, few people could recite the school's mission. Now, our new mission statement serves as the foundation for everything that we do here: Bryant College is a student-centered College, focused on excellence, that prepares its students to achieve their personal best in life and business."

Following the adoption of a new mission statement, the second milestone in Bryant's recent marketing history involved a significant infusion of new faculty and administrative talent, including marketing champion Sevilla.

Today, he and his team plan and implement an impressive array of strategic, integrated marketing campaigns that communicate a consistent message about Bryant, propelling the College along its path to prominence.

"We brought on board a group of educators and leaders who have worked very well together to develop and breathe life into a highly integrated, research-based marketing program," Machtley continues. "Most gratifying to me is the fact that our marketing program, like our academic program, is singularly focused on serving our students, and it is true to our rich heritage."

Evidence of the College's student focus can be seen in everything from clear strategic plan linkages with the Bryant brand promise (A Bryant education is the difference that enables each student to succeed), to the school's key brand attributes or vivid descriptors (knowledge, character, success). Bryant continues their student focus with a collection of strategically designed promotional materials including new recruitment publications and a recruitment-specific Web site (www.admission.bryant.edu). The College sustains an advertising presence on National Public Radio. They also place strategic advertisements in high visibility media such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *the New York Times*, and *the Boston Globe*. Bryant maintains an aggressive and highly successful media relations program and a cutting-edge e-newsletter for academic opinion makers (<http://momentum.bryant.edu>). Of equal importance are on-campus executions of the brand attributes, which range from driveway banners that celebrate knowledge, character, and success to a newly launched "Ethics and Community" speaker series.

Not surprisingly, at the heart of the Bryant mission and brand is a commitment to operate the College using fundamental business best practices, including a campus-wide focus on return on investment. "We know that a sound and strong organization provides us the best opportunity to give good students a great education, and that's what we're all about," Machtley concludes.



STAMATS



Promises kept.

615 Fifth Street SE P.O. Box 1888
Cedar Rapids, IA 52406-1888
319.364.6167 • toll free: 800.553.8878
fax: 319.365.5421
www.stamats.com