

Raising CSUN's Reputation and Visibility

Overview

CSUN has the rare combination of a President who is vigorously leading the charge for increasing the reputation and visibility of the University, a campus embrace of the notion that marketing is important, our highest level volunteer leaders who are pushing the campus in this direction, and new leadership of marketing and communications with deep experience, commitment and energy. These circumstances provide us with a rare and pressing opportunity to transform CSUN's reputation by honing our identity as an institution and strategically deploying our messaging and strength to the external world.

A strong identity adds value and creates loyalty. But CSUN's external identity does not effectively reflect the strength of the institution to its various audiences. The University's communications have no consistency, very little strategic targeting, and are produced by diffused marketing teams across campus. Because of this, every communication or design project is a solitary endeavor, and collectively, they have little impact on CSUN's reputation.

The need to develop, nurture and advance CSUN's reputation and visibility with our target audiences led to the issuance of a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) this fall to launch a CSUN Shine visibility campaign. We are now positioned to embark on that project with the selected vendor, 160over90. They are the right partner at the right time in CSUN's history. Together, we will pursue a sophisticated approach that utilizes expert talent and proven practices to move CSUN's position forward throughout our region, our state, our nation and even globally.

There will be multiple benefits to this initiative, but the core goal is to advance CSUN's reputation and visibility in the minds of key influencers in the Los Angeles region — those who are hiring our graduates and those who have the ability to support CSUN. The process to reach this goal, including strong measures of success, is outlined below. Work is beginning in spring 2014 with an expected launch in fall 2014.

RFQ Process

With extensive input from key individuals across campus and formal discussions at Cabinet and Extended Cabinet, CSUN issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for marketing and branding agencies to aid us in our external launch of the CSUN Shine campaign. The RFQ, which is attached, portrayed the current marketing landscape at CSUN, described past research that was conducted to determine desired messaging, and highlighted the target audiences and desired outcomes. This RFQ was issued publicly for any agency to respond. A careful review of likely firms led us to also extend direct invitations to four firms. There were two submittals — one from an invited firm and one from a firm recommended by an invitee.

During this external search for a partner to help launch CSUN Shine into the greater marketplace, we also moved forward with developing the Matador Marketing Group (MMG), including the participation and leadership of VISCOM, marketing faculty and students, and Geographic

Information Systems (GIS) faculty and students. MMG offered an option to develop the CSUN identity using internal resources.

MMG and the two external agencies, 160over90 and Window In Communications, presented to President's Cabinet and responded to questions about their qualifications and strategy to advance CSUN via an external campaign. Reference checks were performed on the external agencies. Based on the presentations and references, the Cabinet selected 160over90 as the most qualified to help CSUN build and launch its reputation and visibility initiative.

Outcomes

A vigorous positioning campaign will have important benefits across campus, including increasing the following:

- Value of a CSUN degree in the minds of potential employers;
- Philanthropic support from non-alumni;
- Philanthropic support from alumni; and
- Corporate involvement and sponsorship.

These are not the only benefits of an enhanced reputation and increased visibility. We also expect to see a positive impact on other areas, such as:

- Demand for a CSUN education;
- Graduate program enrollment;
- Academic profile of freshman class;
- Grants and contracts;
- Attracting and retaining talented faculty and staff; and
- Attendance at CSUN athletic and cultural events.

Audiences

While a comprehensive positioning effort will have broad and overlapping influence on multiple audiences, all of whom are important, the above outcome priorities inform which audiences should receive the most attention in the external visibility effort.

1. People living and or working in the CSUN service area that have influence and the ability to provide or deliver philanthropic and other resources to the University
2. People living and or working in Los Angeles who have influence and the ability to provide or deliver philanthropic and other resources to the University
3. All alumni, but particularly those in the greater Los Angeles area
4. Faculty and staff
5. Current students
6. Prospective students
7. Families of past, current and prospective students

Reputation and Visibility Initiative Process

Discovery

The 160over90 process started with a targeted Discovery, which allowed them to learn more about CSUN as an institution and fully understand our overall mission, philosophy, challenges, key objectives and positioning within the higher education landscape. This was accomplished through custom questionnaires, interviews with key stakeholders and target audiences, as well as a thorough assessment of current collateral and communications materials from across campus. In addition, CSUN is initiating a separate quantitative study with an independent market research expert to provide a baseline reading of CSUN's reputational awareness and attitudes among the target audiences.

While President Harrison and her Cabinet serve as the ultimate decision-makers for this process, two committees — a steering committee and a larger advisory committee both composed of campus leaders and stakeholders including students, faculty, staff and administrators — provide much of the guidance to 160over90. Chaired by the Associate Vice President for Marketing and Communications, these groups include key campus leaders representing faculty, staff and students. The members serve as key ambassadors throughout the project.

In addition to the Steering and Advisory Committees, the kick-off included a series of initial consultative meetings with campus and external stakeholders.

After these initial meetings, 160over90 undertook an intensive three-day immersion at CSUN to experience the University's community first-hand. They toured the campus and interviewed the project team, dozens of faculty and staff, current students, University leadership, alumni, donors, trustees, community and business leaders, and other stakeholders. In total, more than 350 individuals were invited to focus groups. These interviews focused on story mining personal anecdotes about the institution, distinguishing CSUN's current reputation and perception, as well as determining expectations for the future. Hearing individual stories about CSUN helps to discover the "moments of truth" that will shape the new position, while also helping to identify any gaps between the University's current perception/positioning with the findings.

Finally, 160over90 will conduct a competitive review to determine how competing and non-competing, yet aspirational institutions, are positioning themselves.

Brand Strategy

A solid Brand Strategy is the foundation for effective communication. It will shape the core message and set the basis for all creative development and marketing collateral. Therefore, the next step in the process of developing a new position and creative platform for CSUN will be the construction of the strategic framework.

160over90 will define and prioritize target audiences, determine key differentiating characteristics and selling points about CSUN and identify specific messaging objectives to reach each audience. They will then translate these findings into an overarching set of Key Messages that both defines CSUN and differentiates it from competitive institutions. This will lead to the development of a comprehensive Creative Brief. The Creative Brief is a two-page strategic document outlining the

assignment, profile of the target audiences, marketing goals, key messages, desired reaction and the required information that must be considered in all materials. The Creative Brief will answer questions such as, “What do we want the target audiences to think after seeing the new CSUN positioning and creative platform?” (the rational part of the equation) and, “What do we want the target audiences to feel after seeing the new CSUN positioning and creative platform?” (the emotional part of the equation). In addition, it will include success criteria to measure the effectiveness of the initiative. The Creative Brief will be developed collaboratively, with the extended cabinet, and additional key student and marketing leaders among the faculty and staff.

Brand Concept

Following the Brand Strategy, 160over90 will develop Brand Concepts, which are potential creative directions for all executions. While the Brand Strategy defines the overall message, the Brand Concept is the “big idea” that ties all marketing and communications materials together. It defines verbal and visual communications for CSUN, as well as the personality and distinct attributes (e.g., tonality, typography, color scheme, voice, etc.). In doing so, this creates a unified theme for each creative execution, ensuring a consistent message across all marketing efforts to reach target audiences effectively.

Two Concepts will be developed with three distinct elements: mood boards, rationale and Proofs of Concept. The mood boards are the visual aids compiled by the creative team from existing inspiration (e.g., photography, graphic elements, illustration, color, typography, etc.) to help illustrate the look, feel and tone of each original concept. The rationale will accompany the mood boards and explain the overall conceptual idea. The Proofs of Concept, which will consist of multiple creative executions delivered in a variety of possible formats, are ultimately what is created from the mood boards and the rationale. The Proofs of Concept will consist of a range of mock-ups of potential marketing and recruitment collateral to show what specific pieces could look like when executed within each creative direction. Executions could include sample website pages, ads, outdoor placements, web banners, brochures, direct mail, on-campus activation, social media pages, alumni programs, etc. Two Brand Concepts will be presented, and CSUN (the extended cabinet, and additional key student and marketing leaders among the faculty and staff) will select one concept to execute. Once a concept is approved, University Marketing and Communications will manage the execution collaboratively with 160over90, with oversight by the Cabinet.

Media/Marketing Plan

Following the development of the Brand Strategy and Brand Concept, 160over90 will create a Media/Marketing Plan to map out how we will reach our target audiences and markets. The plan will outline a multi-tiered strategy that is tailored for each target audience segment identified during the Brand Strategy phase, allowing CSUN to reach audiences in a way that ensures they are most likely to be receptive based on such factors as timing, placement, medium and message. Additionally, the plan will outline recommended media, including search, digital, social media, outdoor, ambient, transit, etc. A high-level competitive media analysis will provide context for how peer/competitor institutions are utilizing advertising media.

In addition to the new external visibility activities of this campaign, there are existing campus media assets that will be utilized, such as:

- CSUN website home page and select other pages;
- CSUN Shine Weekly, a weekly e-newsletter that goes to faculty and staff and alumni and friends;
- CSUN social media properties (including the CSU-leading Facebook page);
- *Northridge Magazine*, which goes out two to four times a year to alumni and friends of the University;
- CSUN media relations activity; and
- Potential use of other high visibility activities such as those connected to KCSN, the Valley Performing Arts Center, Matador Athletics.

Reputation and Visibility Initiative Rollout

By pursuing a logical, disciplined and highly collaborative process for discovering fundamental truth regarding CSUN's identity, CSUN will be well positioned to successfully deploy its external identity into the marketplace. The Reputation and Visibility Initiative Rollout will include a series of key meetings and initiatives that will specifically inform stakeholders about the new positioning and equip internal marketers to effectively use it. The rollout will begin after the approval of the Brand Concept and will consist of a series of Town Hall meetings in which 160over90 and the President, Cabinet and Steering Committee will present a summary version of the concept to the community, ensuring they have a voice and become ambassadors of the efforts prior to finding them in the marketplace.

In addition, 160over90 will facilitate Communication Camps for internal marketers who are responsible for creating materials within the new marketing communications framework and guidelines. These Communication Camps will be comprised of several tutorials, in which 160over90 will present the new visual identity and positioning in full detail, deconstructing key design and copy elements like photographic style, illustration style, typography, sample layouts, and copy style, tone and voice.

160over90 will also supply Brand Guidelines to ensure that the CSUN community can efficiently and effectively utilize the new look and feel on their own. A microsite will be developed to house the marketing communications elements and other resources.

Once the position and guidelines are fully understood and embraced by the University's internal audiences, the campaign can be launched and executed across various communications mediums to effectively reach external audiences.

Creative Development/Deliverables

Concurrent to the Reputation and Visibility Initiative Rollout, 160over90 and internal marketing teams will develop the creative executions that will bring the new visual identity and position into the public realm. These deliverables will be defined as part of the Discovery and Brand Strategy phases of the initiative but will likely include advertising placements (multiple media formats), photography asset bank development and the development of the brand resources microsite.

Internal Resources

By partnering with 160over90, we are focusing on building the infrastructure to sustain long-term gains toward the primary and secondary outcomes. In addition to utilizing internally controlled media opportunities, we will also take advantage of internal resources to build and deploy the CSUN identity.

The partnership that formed the Matador Marketing Group — Marketing and Communications, Center for Geographical Studies, Wells Fargo Center for Small Business & Entrepreneurship, and the Center for Visual Communication (VISCOM) — will continue and support this initiative in substantive ways. Each group will play a consultative role in the initial identity development and contribute their core expertise to the project and long-term rollout.

In addition, it will be essential for other unit-based marketing teams on campus to strongly support and adopt the new CSUN brand resources as their own and become CSUN brand champions. Together, this will provide the platform to advance both the institutional position and the individual division, department, center and other campus communication platforms. A well-orchestrated harmony will replace a directionless cacophony.