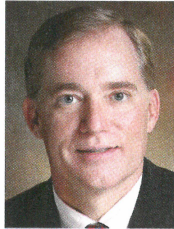


The President and Institutional Branding

Take every opportunity and utilize every venue to tell your story.

BY DR. SCOTT D. MILLER AND DR. MARYLOUISE FENNELL



THE CONGESTED COLLEGE and university marketplace means that every presidential communication must further institutional branding and messaging. Contemporary presidents are the public “face” of the institution, and competition for audiences’ attention has never been fiercer.



Here are some suggestions from our experience that will help you make every communication count while enabling your messaging to stand out among others.

Communicate across multiple platforms to tell your story.

Use of social media such as presidential e-letters, blogs, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Facebook increase frequency of communication to key current and future constituencies, including prospective students, families, and donors, at little or no cost.

Using such technologies, presidents can foster and cultivate new relationships, expand existing networks, and raise the entire institutional profile. Further, a great deal of mileage can be gained from reprints of such communications — in fact, often more than from the initial exposure.

Raise your visibility.

Because the president is the public face of an institution, it is important that the image he or she presents is both reflective of the institution’s mission and values and also in sync with its core messaging and overall branding strategy. The president is the institution to most key publics, including the media. Perception is reality when it comes to such marketing communications.

Communicate early and often.

In his 2007 bestseller *Millennials Go to College*, Neil Howe observes that if prospective students don’t know your brand by the age of 13, it is unlikely that they will consider applying when they are high school juniors. Thus, it is critical that you get your institutional brand out early and often. Just as the successful realtor’s mantra is “location, location, location,” the effective communicator relies on “repetition, repetition, repetition.”

Presidents need to be able to relate what’s been called the “30-second elevator message” about their institutions in a concise, compelling way.

Consistency is key.

Many communications experts have noted that when evaluating the efficacy of messaging, they find that consistency and continuity often trump content. In an August 2012 interview with the *McKinsey Quarterly*’s Allen Webb, Olympic decathlon champion Dan O’Brien observes, “In the long run, consistency always wins out.” O’Brien won a gold medal in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, following three consecutive world titles in decathlon.

“Although Dan’s commentary focuses on athletics, not business, executives may find parallels between the competitive challenges he describes and those facing their companies,” Webb notes. Simply put, it’s almost impossible to repeat a message too often for today’s multitaskers.

Cultivate compelling messages.

A vast body of research demonstrates time and again that people act on emotion undergirded by fact much more responsively than they do on the basis of facts alone. Emotions and effective storytelling trump facts, data, and statistics every time. Personalizing, localizing, and using emotion to connect with audiences are the hallmarks of persuasive communications that cause people to change their behaviors in ways favorable to the college or university. We like the “SUCCES” formula for “sticky messages” advanced by authors Chip and Dan Heath: compelling and memorable messages must be simple, unexpected, concrete, concise, use emotions, and tell stories.

So, as a college president, tell your story as often and in as many ways as possible. [TAM](#)

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