

The elements of brand-building in higher education: The role of strategy, research and internal engagement

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Abstract

In 2007, as part of an eight-month process to change its name to Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T), the University of Missouri-Rolla launched an intensive rebranding effort to maintain awareness among its key audiences, particularly prospective students, alumni and employers of graduates. Six years later, the university conducted an extensive market research project to determine various audiences' perceptions of the institution since its name change and, based on the outcomes of that research, revised its brand identity, messaging and positioning to better reflect the institution's visibility goals as outlined in a new strategic plan. This paper examines the role of strategy, market research and internal engagement in building a brand during two distinct points in one university's recent history and provides guidance and takeaways for communications officers, marketing officers and brand managers responsible for stewarding a college or university through a brand-building exercise.

Keywords

branding, brand identity, university branding, university marketing, marketing, communications, strategy, strategic planning, name change, higher education

INTRODUCTION

When John F. Carney III, then chancellor of the University of Missouri-Rolla (UMR), announced in October 2006 that he wanted that institution's students, alumni, faculty and staff to begin a conversation about changing the institution's name to something 'more distinctive', the announcement came as a surprise to many on campus. After all, things were

running smoothly at UMR. Enrolment was on the upswing, record numbers of employers were attending the campus's career fairs to recruit graduates, and the university was poised to launch the public phase of a capital campaign the following spring. There was no real sense of urgency to 'fix' the university's identity; no fiscal or brand crisis was on the horizon.

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Moreover, the announcement came on the heels of two other recent name changes at Missouri campuses. In 2005, Southwest Missouri State University dropped the directional modifier from its name to become Missouri State University, and Central Missouri State University had recently gained approval from the Missouri legislature to revise its name to the University of Central Missouri, an action that institution took in August 2007. Was this notion to consider a name change merely one university leader following the latest trend in higher education branding? Or was there something more substantial to Carney's call for the campus to engage in a discussion about the university's name?

It turned out that a potential crisis was looming. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that the number of high school graduates from Missouri — which consistently accounted for roughly three-fourths of the university's student body — was expected to decline in the coming years.¹ A decline in the high school graduation rate was also projected for nearby states, portions of the northeastern United States and the Great Plains states, while high school graduation rates in the west, southwest and portions of the south were expected to increase. To maintain strong enrolment growth, the university would need to look beyond Missouri and the Midwest, and focus on attracting students from the growth states. Yet Carney and others — notably, the campus's board of trustees, an advisory group of prominent alumni — worried that the university's name would not be a strong selling point. It did not convey the institution's emphasis on the STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The demographic shifts that underscored a potential drop in enrolment was only one factor that prompted UMR's leadership to consider a name change. It was also the most tangible. Other factors had to do with the university's brand identity, reputation and position in an increasingly competitive market for students, private support and research dollars. For UMR, the name change conversation also provided an opportunity for campus leaders to address an issue that had been lingering since it first changed its name more than 40 years ago.

The process the university undertook to facilitate the name change and its related branding challenges is the first chapter in the campus's brand evolution over the past decade. The second chapter began in 2014, when Missouri S&T undertook its first comprehensive market research project since the name change.

The Missouri S&T brand evolution story is still being written, but these two milestone events — the name change and the market research effort — share common themes related to the importance of presenting a strategy, employing sound research practices and gaining consensus among many stakeholder groups. The Missouri S&T experience also provides a case study in change management and brand building in the higher education sector.

REFOCUSING THE INSTITUTION'S BRAND

A name change would be nothing new for the institution, which was founded in 1870 as the University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy. The campus was one of many 'school of mines' institutions during that era and the first one west of the Mississippi River. Located near the state's lead mining district, the 'Missouri

School of Mines', as it was known, was established as a public land-grant institution, but was not a standalone university. It was a 'school' under the University of Missouri campus based in Columbia.

As with similar engineering-focused institutions, the Missouri School of Mines (MSM) experienced tremendous growth following World War II and by the early 1960s, MSM had become a research institution and was home to Missouri's first nuclear reactor. By then, the University of Missouri had added two more campuses (in Kansas City and St Louis) and expanded into a four-campus system. MSM's name was then changed to the University of Missouri-Rolla. In the process of moving from 'school' to 'university', aspects of the institution's identity eroded. While it had grown beyond a school of mines even before the change to UMR, the campus's new moniker said nothing about the institution's emphasis on STEM education.

Almost from the outset of the university's name change from MSM to UMR, students, alumni and campus leaders questioned whether the new name helped or hindered the institution's reputation. Prior to Carney, at least two chancellors had discussed the possibility of changing the university's name. With support from the university's trustees and other advisory groups of alumni, Carney was able to push the conversation forward.

University name changes have become almost fashionable in recent years. Often, the changes involve an upgrade of an institution's name from 'college' to 'university' to indicate the breadth of academic offerings or the existence of graduate programmes, or the removal of regional designations to broaden the institution's appeal.² But university administrators considering a name change for their institution should approach the

idea with caution, because it involves considerable risk to brand identity, reputation and brand equity associated with the current name. Two researchers investigating the impact of name changes in Italian universities suggest that 'a name change should be considered as the ultimate solution in corporate re-branding', rather than a quick fix.³

THE CASE FOR A NEW NAME

Whether it involves a name change or some other branding initiative, higher education is a sector unlike any other when it comes to brand building. The leaders of our colleges and universities may like to talk about business models for operating our complex institutions, but higher education is not a business. It occupies a distinctive space, one that requires the engagement and buy-in of many stakeholders. As Tony Proudfoot of the University of Arizona noted in a recent *CASE Currents* paper, 'Universities are unique in nature. They have shared governance. They ideally have a lifelong relationship with their stakeholders. The quality and talent of an institution's faculty help determine its strength. Is any other sector completely dependent upon the effort and abilities of its customers? Universities can offer a world-class education, but students can't attain it unless they do their part and become partners in the educational process.'⁴ Given the unique structure of higher education, the need for consensus building and buy-in is significant. While leaders of a corporation can engage in a re-branding or re-naming effort with little input from employees, a university president has little chance of succeeding at a re-naming without gaining input from the faculty.

At the University of Missouri-Rolla, we began the process of starting the

conversation by presenting the case for a name change and by sharing that case with as many stakeholders as possible. The author worked with Carney and other administrators to draft a white paper, 'The case for a name change',⁵ that formed the basis of our case. This was an important first step in crafting a strategy for broaching the idea of a name change with various audiences. Throughout the early stages of discussion and dissemination, our emphasis was on holding a conversation and gathering feedback.

Our white paper outlined the rationale for discussing a name change. It consisted of four key points:

- *To distinguish our institution from the other University of Missouri System campuses.* Among the four University of Missouri campuses, our institution is unique because of its emphasis on STEM-focused education and research. The university's name, however, did not reflect the distinctive nature of the campus, and often was viewed as a 'satellite' or 'branch' campus. This branch campus designation hinders efforts to achieve national recognition and a strong reputation as a technological research university.
- *To reflect the university's national mission.* At the time this process was undertaken, our university's goal was to be recognised as one of the nation's top five technological research universities by 2010. Many of our 'comparator' institutions possess names that better reflect their mission. Universities such as California Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Georgia Institute of Technology (who we considered to be the top four technological research universities) all have names that reflect

their mission. Many other institutions similar to our campus, including Michigan Technological University (a former 'school of mines') and Stevens Institute of Technology, have names that reflect the STEM focus of their institutions.

- *To broaden our market share for the best students nationally.* At the time, interest in engineering was in decline nationally, and less than 5 per cent of college-bound high school seniors expressed an interest in engineering. Compounding this problem for our campus, the number of high school graduates in Missouri was expected to decline by around 10 per cent between 2010 and 2013. More than 75 per cent of our students traditionally come from Missouri, with the remainder coming mostly from contiguous states. The shifting demographics and declining student interest in engineering and science threatened our university's future viability. We maintained that a name that is more descriptive of our focus in science and technology would help us attract the students interested in such an education.
- *To enhance the university's reputation.* While our institution was known in the Midwest and in specialised circles for academic excellence, it was less well known on a national and international scale. A more distinctive, mission-based name, we reasoned, would help us achieve national visibility for recruiting efforts and research programmes. This increased visibility would in turn lead to stronger graduate programmes and additional research funding.

With a white paper in hand, we began the hard work of sharing this information with stakeholders and discussing the merits of a name change. We hosted forums with students, faculty and staff

on campus, and communicated with our 50,000 alumni through the winter 2006 issue of our alumni magazine and by e-mail. That issue included a paper survey asking for alumni feedback on a name change. We conducted an online survey of internal stakeholders in January and February of 2007. Also in January 2007, we established a blog titled 'Name Change Conversations'⁶ as a place for stakeholders to share their ideas, thoughts, concerns and yes, complaints about the idea of a name change. (These were the days before social media exploded; blogs were the state of the art platform for connecting with stakeholders on a global scale.)

We received a high level of input from all groups. Reviews were mixed. Opposition to a name change was greatest among current undergraduate students and recent graduates, while faculty, staff and graduate students (many of them international) all slightly favoured a name change. If our unscientific poll of alumni magazine readers was any indication, support for a name change was strong, with more than 70 per cent of the 955 alumni who responded saying they favoured a name change. Some of our older alumni suggested we reclaim our former name, the Missouri School of Mines. ('What a wonderful opportunity to change to a name known and revered the world over: MSM,' wrote one.) Many, however, decided after reading the white paper or the magazine article, that we were taking a reasoned approach to the discussion and changed their opinion as a result. As one graduate wrote in response to the survey, 'Before I read this edition of *UMR Magazine*, I was against the name change. Thank you for outlining the objectives and showing how our school compares to others.'

DIGGING DEEPER INTO DATA

Armed with data about what our internal stakeholders thought, we still lacked good information about other key audiences, such as prospective undergraduate students, employers of our students and the Rolla community. We contracted with a higher education marketing and research firm, SimpsonScarborough, to float some possible names by these groups. The firm surveyed prospective students from Missouri and contiguous states, and conducted in-depth interviews with community and business leaders, high school guidance counsellors, and representatives of key companies that recruited our students. For each audience, we narrowed their options to five potential names, including the current name, and asked: 'What name best represents a nationally recognized science and engineering university?' The options were:

- University of Missouri-Rolla;
- Missouri Polytechnic University;
- Missouri Science and Technology University;
- Missouri University of Science and Technology; and
- Technological University of Missouri.

Across all audiences, Missouri University of Science and Technology was seen as the most appealing name. But employers and community members tended to be less enthusiastic for a new name than other audiences. UMR was the name they were used to and, for the community and local business leaders especially, keeping the city's name in the university's name was a point of pride.

Prospective undergraduate students offered a much different perspective. More than 51 per cent chose 'Missouri University of Science and Technology'

as their preferred name, while only 11.5 per cent selected the current name. The second-place offering, 'Technological University of Missouri,' garnered only a 15 per cent share.

When asked why they picked the name they did, those who selected 'Missouri University of Science and Technology' responded that it 'sounds right or flows well' (33 per cent), 'reflects the university's strength' (29 per cent) or liked the phrase 'science and technology' (28 per cent).

Carney presented these findings to the University of Missouri System Board of Curators, the governing board for all UM System campuses, and on 6th April, 2007, the curators approved renaming the University of Missouri-Rolla to Missouri University of Science and Technology. The new name would take effect on 1st January, 2008.

Next came the enormous and complex task of implementing the change and building a brand identity that would reflect the new name. With less than eight months before the change would take effect, we had a lot to do.

ENGAGEMENT: INSIDE AND OUT

The first order of business was to involve as many internal stakeholders as possible in the effort. Carney appointed me to lead the effort, and the author and his staff contacted individuals across the broad spectrum of academia and administration. We involved student leaders, faculty representatives, and administrators and staff who would be most involved in working with external stakeholders and working to ensure a smooth transition internally. Our broad-based 'name change committee' included individuals from alumni relations and athletics, our career centre, financial aid, IT, enrolment management

and admissions, and various academic departments, as well as our central communications team.

We also contacted colleagues at Missouri State University, which had undergone a name change just two years before. Our Missouri State counterparts provided immensely helpful insights, including the recommendation to engage a broad base of campus constituents and a process for determining how funds would be allocated for various name change expenses, such as signage, letterhead and marketing materials.

Our name change group met weekly to address a range of details — from coordinating the allocation of funds available for signage, athletic uniforms, band uniforms and student recruitment materials, to details related to our web and e-mail domain change, developing protocol for notifying outside organisations about the change, achieving consensus on a new logo design and a corresponding visual identity, developing a timeline and rollout plan for the new name, and even considering a new name for our alumni association (the MSM-UMR Alumni Association would become the Miner Alumni Association, as a nod to our school of mines heritage and our athletics teams, 'the Miners'). The process was not without its bumps — discussions about the logo design dragged on for weeks and were painful — but it established a process for an essential step in building a brand identity: buy-in and consensus building.

In addition to ensuring internal buy-in throughout the process, we determined it most important to keep two key external audiences engaged throughout the process: prospective students and alumni. Because of our focus on these two groups, other important audiences — notably, academic leaders who are asked to address the

reputations of colleges and universities for publications such as *U.S. News & World Report* — received considerably less attention. Following the first year of the name change, we invested a modest sum in an effort to reach these influential *U.S. News* voters. The effort consisted of a postcard and e-newsletter campaign, supplemented by an annual publication sent to academic leaders.

The lessons learned during the process of changing from UMR to Missouri S&T would serve our university well a few years later when we embarked on a different sort of branding adventure.

STRATEGIC BRAND EVOLUTION

As we learned through the process of managing the name change, converting an institution from one name to another does not happen with the mere flick of a switch or the press a button. Communicating the benefits of the change, early and often, is essential to demonstrate the positive impact to sceptics and believers alike.

In his book *Leading Change*, John P. Kotter talks about the importance of securing and communicating ‘short-term wins’, the sixth of his eight-step formula for transforming organisations through practical change management.⁷ (While academic experts on change management note that Kotter’s book is not intended for a scholarly audience and that his eight-step model has not been validated through research, the model is still considered to be ‘an excellent starting point for managers implementing change in their organizations’ but ‘should not be considered as something that guarantees success.’)⁸ At Missouri S&T, we did not methodically adopt Kotter’s model or follow all of the steps or in sequence. But in the autumn

2008 semester we were quick to share some of the chief short-term benefits of the name change:

- The largest enrollment in 20 years.
- A broader reach beyond the Midwest.
- A 41.5 per cent increase in out-of-state inquiries.
- A 5.6 per cent increase in corporate recruiter interest.

We distributed handouts containing this information to all internal stakeholders as well as to alumni leaders, state legislators and community representatives.

Even though the Great Recession of 2008 hit soon after the name change rollout, enrolment at Missouri S&T continued to grow at a robust pace during and after the recession. This growth may be due in part to the perception that engineering, computing and related disciplines lead to ‘recession-proof’ careers,⁹ and a degree in a STEM field was a safe bet in a down economy. But as enrolment continued its steady climb, it was easy to conclude that the name change had not harmed student recruitment efforts. Enrolment increased from 6,167 in the autumn of 2007 (the final year that the institution was called the University of Missouri-Rolla) to 7,522 in the autumn of 2011. The university experienced record enrolment for three consecutive years — 2013 through 2015 — before experiencing a slight decline in 2016. Between the autumn of 2007 and the autumn of 2016, enrollment increased by 43.3 per cent — from 6,167 to 8,838 — following a record high enrolment of 8,889 in the fall of 2015.

By the time our next chancellor, Cheryl B. Schrader, arrived on campus in April 2012, many of the same indicators we had used to measure short-term success were holding steady. While we

could not prove that the name change had led to increases in enrolment, out-of-state inquiries, reach and recruiter interest, those positive indicators revealed that the name change did not negatively affect our enrolment or visibility with prospective students. Nevertheless, we continued to hear scattered anecdotes about a general lack of awareness of our new name, and because our *U.S. News & World Report* rankings had slipped in the aftermath of the name change, we saw the need to focus more on raising awareness with audiences beyond the two we had paid the most attention to, our prospective students and alumni. Beyond ensuring that enrolment growth and alumni engagement continued, we did not have a brand strategy.

Once again, however, timing was on our side. Soon after Schrader's appointment as chancellor, she launched a strategic planning process that placed visibility front and centre. (Development of this strategic plan, like our management of the name change, was an inclusive and broad-based process that involved stakeholders across campus as well as alumni, research partners and employers of our students.) One of the strategic plan's four themes is to 'Enhance Reputation and Raise Visibility', and one of the levers (or action items) under that theme called upon us to 'Create and implement a communication and marketing plan to raise the visibility of the campus and convey our return on investment.' Our team was charged with owning the process of creating and implementing that communication and marketing plan.¹⁰

TWO LEVELS OF BUY-IN

Our team understood that before we embarked on creating a plan to raise visibility and convey our return on investment, we

would need to get our hands on some data that could tell us how certain audiences perceived our university and just how visible we were to those groups. We also understood, from our experience facilitating the name change rebranding, that we would need to involve our campus community in the process. Beginning in 2013, soon after our university's strategic plan was completed and made public, we established two groups to help us create a process for carrying out the work allotted to us by the strategic plan.

We called one group the *Marketing Leadership Team*. This team consisted of the chancellor, the provost and other campus leaders who were responsible for connecting with one or more of our six customers at the highest levels. Our strategic plan is designed to address the needs of six customers (rather than audiences): undergraduate students, graduate students, distance and online students, research partners, employers and donors. The director of career opportunities and employer relations, therefore, served on this team as the liaison to employers of our students, while the vice provost for undergraduate studies and vice provost for graduate studies both served as representatives for undergraduate students and graduate students, respectively. This group's role was to provide leadership guidance and counsel for our process, and, when warranted, make decisions related to the execution of our plan.

The other group is the *Core Marketing Network*. This group consists of individuals whose work puts them in touch with one or more of our key customer groups, but in a more direct fashion. While the vice chancellor for university advancement serves on the Marketing Leadership Team as the liaison to donors, the director of annual giving, a major gifts officer and an assistant director of

alumni relations all serve on this panel. In addition to those staff members who work directly with key audiences, the Core Marketing Network includes student and faculty representation, as well as communications and marketing specialists who were assigned to specific units outside of our central staff. Like the Marketing Leadership Team, this group provided advice and input to our team as we move through our brand-building process, but did not play a role in decision making related to the brand strategy or marketing plan.

By involving campus leadership as well as mid-level managers, students, faculty and staff, we were intentional in our effort to get input and buy-in for our marketing strategy.

A RESEARCH-DRIVEN STRATEGY

The Marketing Leadership Team and Core Marketing Network were both involved in our efforts to revise our brand. It began with preparing a request for proposals to contract with one or more marketing consultants who could help us in three areas:

- Conduct comprehensive market research on which we could update and refine our brand identity.
- Refine our brand identity and provide the framework for a communications and marketing plan.
- Assess our capability, staffing and readiness to launch a full-fledged marketing strategy.

We involved both groups in reviewing responses to our request for proposals, in narrowing down finalists, in interviewing the finalists and in selecting the firms we would hire to assist us. (We ended up

hiring one firm, SimpsonScarborough, to do the market research and capabilities assessment and another, Ologie, to do the brand identity work.) From there, we continued to involve both groups throughout the research effort — some were even interviewed by consultants as part of the process — and in our launch of a refined brand identity.

The research project was carried out in two phases, one qualitative and one quantitative (see Table 1).

The first phase (the qualitative phase) was carried out in the autumn of 2014 and involved in-depth interviews and focus groups with some of our customer groups as identified by our strategic plan, as well as with other groups (such as college and university presidents and prospective undergraduate and graduate students). This research was intended to help inform the development of the survey instrument for the second phase (the quantitative phase). During phase two, SimpsonScarborough administered surveys to potential undergraduate students, potential graduate students, alumni and internal stakeholders (students, faculty and staff). Those surveys were conducted in February 2015.

Both the qualitative and quantitative efforts were designed to help us answer these questions:

- What level of awareness and familiarity with Missouri S&T exists among our key external target audiences? How does this compare to key competitive institutions?
- How willing are key audiences to recommend Missouri S&T? What is the level of interest in attending?
- What are the key attributes associated with Missouri S&T? How has that changed since 2008 (the year of the name change)? And how does the university

TABLE 1 Research scope of work

<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Sampling frame</i>	<i>Qualitative research</i>	<i>Quantitative research</i>
Prospective undergraduate students	Current high school juniors who have not yet applied for admission	2 online focus groups	Online survey
Prospective graduate and distance/online students	Current graduate student prospects and distance/online inquirers	4 online focus groups— 2 with graduate prospects; 2 with distance/online	Online survey
Alumni and donors	All alumni and donors on file	2 online focus groups	Online survey
Internal audiences	Current students, faculty, and professional staff	On campus discussions	Online survey
High school guidance counsellors	Pre-college liaisons	20 in-depth interviews	—
Corporate recruiters/ research liaisons	University research liaisons and recruiters	20 in-depth interviews	—
Higher education peers	Academic and administrative leaders at institutions Missouri S&T considers to be peers	20 in-depth interviews	—

compare and perform with its key competitors?

- How has the opinion of Missouri S&T changed among key audiences over time?
- What makes Missouri S&T distinct in the minds of alumni? What motivates them to donate?
- What motivates an opinion leader likely to hire a Missouri S&T graduate or seek a partnership with the university?
- What do higher education peers think and how aware are they of Missouri S&T?
- What marketing messages about Missouri S&T will motivate alumni to engage with the university? Prospective students to choose the university? Peers

in higher education to view us favourably? And give us the ability to attract top-notch faculty, staff and funding opportunities?

- How do elements of Missouri S&T's strategic plan align to its image and desired position and which areas provide the greatest opportunity to connect with audiences and increase interest and awareness?

While response rates varied from a low of 2 per cent (among prospective undergraduate students and prospective graduate students) to a high of 25 per cent (among staff), the margin of error for all audiences was low enough to allow for some important conclusions (see Table 2). Through

TABLE 2 Quantitative research scope of work and results

	<i>Undergraduate prospects</i>	<i>Graduate prospects</i>	<i>Current undergraduate</i>	<i>Current graduate</i>	<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Alumni</i>
E-mails sent	22,192	10,301	6,449	1,974	442	868	19,799
E-mails bounced	356	165	0	0	0	0	73
E-mails delivered	21,836	10,136	6,449	1,974	442	868	19,726
Number of respondents	426	159	694	206	99	215	1,453
Response rate	2%	2%	11%	10%	22%	25%	7%
Margin of error	+/- 4.7%	+/- 7.7%	+/- 3.5%	+/- 6.5%	+/- 8.7%	+/- 5.8%	+/- 2.5%

both the qualitative and quantitative research, we determined the following:

- *National awareness varies by audience.* During the quantitative phase of the research, a national sampling of prospective undergraduate students rated Missouri S&T second in terms of unaided awareness of ‘excellent science and technology colleges and universities.’ (Unaided awareness refers to awareness without any prompting or knowledge of what organization is sponsoring the survey.) Among prospective graduate students, however, awareness of Missouri S&T was not as strong, and Missouri S&T lagged behind other technological research universities in terms of unaided awareness.

Specifically:

- For prospective undergraduates as well as prospective graduate students, one major national university was the ‘high bar’ above any other institution. That university was cited by 61 per cent of undergraduates and 50 per cent of graduate students.
- Missouri S&T was cited by 25 per cent of undergraduate students, placing it a distant second but above three other well-known institutions, which were cited by 23 per cent, 22 per cent and 15 per cent of respondents.
- Among prospective graduate students, Missouri S&T was cited 16 per cent of the time, placing it fifth among institutions mentioned at greater levels (50 per cent, 25 per cent, 19 per cent and 18 per cent).
- *Name recognition remains a concern.* In-depth interviews with employers, research partners and leaders at other universities indicate a perception of Missouri S&T as a regional university rather than a national university. This is a concern among

academic leaders but was not specifically addressed in the quantitative research. When prospective undergraduate and graduate students were presented with a competitive set of seven institutions that included Missouri S&T, however, 82 per cent of prospective undergraduate students and 84 per cent of prospective graduate students said they had heard of Missouri S&T. This indicates that the great majority of respondents were familiar with the institution.

- *S&T’s academic excellence is recognised.* Forty-two per cent of potential undergraduate and graduate students rate Missouri S&T high in academic quality among a set of competitor and peer universities.
- *S&T meets prospects’ expectations.* Prospective undergraduates indicated that they want to study on a campus that is safe, where students are involved in activities and clubs, and where students are driven and know what they want. Current undergraduates surveyed say Missouri S&T meets all three criteria. This congruence of prospects’ expectations with current students’ perceptions indicates that the university’s marketing messaging aligns well with the desires of prospective students.
- *S&T perceived as ‘innovative’ and ‘respected’.* Prospective undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, faculty and staff all agree: innovative and respected are the words that best describe Missouri S&T. Asked to select five words from a list of 22 adjectives that (for prospects) best describe the type of institution they would most like to attend or (for current students) best describe Missouri S&T, ‘innovative’ and ‘respected’ rose to the top among both audiences. Faculty, staff and alumni also put those two adjectives at the top of their lists.

- *Alumni are proud Miners.* Ninety-four per cent of alumni say they are proud to have graduated from our university. The research also indicated that even the highly engaged alumni desired to be more engaged with Missouri S&T.

These findings have informed the goals for our communications and marketing strategy. Armed with these results and guided by certain elements of our strategic plan, we consulted with our Marketing Leadership Team and developed eight marketing goals. Most of them are connected to the research results. For example, one goal calls on us to raise awareness of our institution among potential graduate students. Our research found we had room for improvement in this area, and moreover, our strategic plan calls for increasing enrollment among graduate students, especially PhD students.

With a solid marketing strategy informed by research and our strategic plan now in place, we again are working with our Core Marketing Network to develop specific tactics related to each goal of the communications and marketing strategy.

BUILDING ON OUR HERITAGE

The research findings, as well as our strategic plan goals, our mission and our vision, have formed the basis of a brand strategy that also builds on our nearly 150-year heritage. It is articulated in a 'brand essence' that says:

Missouri S&T builds upon a heritage of discovery, creativity and innovation across all academic and research disciplines so that our community is inspired and ready to pursue and solve the world's great challenges.

This brand essence is further articulated by a specific phrase that, once again, connects with our heritage:

Miners Dig Deeper

The phrase is not a tagline, but rather the essence of our brand positioning statement,¹¹ and a shorthand phrase to describe the type of institution Missouri S&T has become. From our roots as a mining school established under the Morrill Land Grant Act to our role today as a major STEM-focused research university, our community — our students, alumni, faculty and staff — possess certain characteristics that make us all Miners. The idea of 'digging deeper' conveys Missouri S&T's reputation as an institution where community members uncover new approaches to learning, research and addressing the world's great challenges. The theme is evidenced by the university's heritage of discovery, creativity and innovation in a broad range of academic disciplines. From groundbreaking advances in nanotechnology, historical research, sustainable materials and cyber security to distinctive academic programmes such as technical communication, explosives engineering, and business and information technology, the S&T community expresses its unique character.

Throughout the process, we have been careful to not label the work of the past three years a 'rebranding' effort. We describe it as a 'brand evolution', because it is constantly changing to conditions and adapting to those conditions, just as the university must.

THE ROLLOUT

Our internal rollout of the brand evolution began in the autumn of 2015 with open forums and presentations with key

stakeholders, including academic department chairs, student groups, the Miner Alumni Association board of directors and the Missouri S&T Board of Trustees. The public rollout began in January 2016 with a website redesign and more formal announcements to alumni audiences and the public through newsletter and magazine articles and a news release.¹² The rollout continued on campus with placement of 'Miners Dig Deeper' banners on campus and training opportunities, including design workshops, an online brand toolkit with templates and other resources (all available at brand.mst.edu), and our first brand symposium, which was held in September 2016.

The brand symposium attracted some 120 participants, most of them staff members who are responsible for creating marketing materials for their departments, but also interested faculty and students. During the symposium, members of the S&T marketing and communications staff presented workshops on a variety of topics, from social media to graphic design and writing for various audiences. The highlight of the symposium was a luncheon keynote by Stefan Mumaw, director of creative strategy at the Kansas City-based creative firm Hint, the author of six books and a highly sought after speaker.

A survey of symposium participants indicated a high level of satisfaction among attendees. Nearly 94 per cent of survey respondents said they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with the event, and more than 94 per cent said they were 'very satisfied' with Mumaw's keynote presentation. Based on the success of this event, a second brand symposium was held in the autumn of 2017.

Other elements of the brand rollout include targeted digital, billboard, print

and radio advertising, updates to numerous print and digital materials, a 60-second video¹³ expressing the brand positioning statement, and further revisions to the university's website. An online gallery of print materials and environmental graphics is available online at brand.mst.edu/showcase/. Our brand rollout efforts garnered three awards from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), District VI.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

As the higher education sector becomes increasingly competitive, colleges and universities face significant challenges not only with recruiting students, but also with securing private funding, research grants and legislative support. Building a brand identity that is distinctive and conveys an institution's value to stakeholders is crucial. Branding is no longer the sole domain of the communications office or the enrolment management office, and recent research suggests that campus visits, word of mouth promotion, programme offerings, cost, and amenities and facilities such as state-of-the-art recreation centres and student housing all play an important role in positioning a university favourably in the minds of prospective students.¹⁵ A university's brand is jointly owned by internal and external constituents, and as such should be developed with involvement from as many representatives of those constituents as is feasible. Our experience at Missouri S&T offers the following lessons that may be of value to other institutions.

First, it is important that *your brand identity be connected to your institution's strategy*. In the case of the name change from UMR to Missouri S&T, our strategy was simple: to change the university's name

to one that reflected its intrinsic nature. This strategy was built on a broader goal of becoming recognised as a leading technological research university. When our institution launched a new strategic plan in 2013, visibility — a core component of brand identity — was front and centre as one of four overarching themes. Connecting the brand building effort to this element of the strategic plan was essential, especially given the prominence the desire for enhanced visibility played in the plan's development. Regardless of whether your institution's strategic plan focuses explicitly on visibility, reputation, or branding or marketing goals, chances are great that the institution's future direction hinges on a brand strategy that is aligned with a strategic plan. Do not discount the strategic plan as yet another document to gather dust on a shelf. Aligning your brand development and marketing strategy with your institution's strategic plan is essential.

Second, *use both strategy and research to build your brand identity*. As we discovered during the process of changing our name, the research findings gave direction, but not all of the findings were helpful, and some findings were more important to the name change strategy than others. Prospective students indicated a preference for one type of name, while community leaders and employers of our students preferred the status quo of UMR. Essential to our strategy, as outlined in the white paper, was to select a name that better communicated the nature of our institution. The research revealed that one very important audience — prospective students — preferred a certain new name, and by a large margin.

Finally, *be as inclusive as possible when attempting to gain buy-in for your branding or marketing efforts*. During our name change, we had a lot to do in a short amount

of time. We had our marching orders under a tight deadline. For such a massive undertaking in such a short time, we had to bring graduate students, undergraduate students, alumni, faculty, staff and administrators together to move forward. We took a similar approach during our more recent research and brand evolution work, only this time around, we had more time. We could be more deliberate and intentional in our approach, and we have been able to listen to a broader range of constituents throughout the process. In both examples, we worked with 40 to 50 individuals. That is a large committee, even by academic standards. With so many personalities involved in the conversations and the process, work can get bogged down, and navigating the perspectives, posturing and politics of so many can be daunting to the brand manager, especially if directing such a committee and this type of work is unfamiliar terrain. The result of this approach, however, will mean a stronger brand and greater ownership across the wide spectrum of university constituents. There is just one catch: the practice of continuously involving internal stakeholders is never finished.

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