

BEST PRACTICES IN IMPROVING REPUTATION AND BRAND RECOGNITION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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In the following report, Hanover Research presents best practices and models for improving reputation and brand awareness in higher education. The first section reviews literature and best practices on the topic, and the second section profiles two institutions that have recently launched rebranding initiatives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In the following report, Hanover Research reviews the literature on best practices and models for improving institutional reputation in higher education, including principles of branding and strategic positioning, challenges of branding campaigns, and examples of rebranding at two small, private institutions. The report comprises two sections:

- **Section I** presents a literature review of reputation and branding, including two applied models for branding in higher education. This section also discusses trends in marketing and brand awareness and common challenges with rebranding initiatives.
- **Section II** provides two brief profiles of branding initiatives at two small, private institutions: Calvin College and Arcadia University.

KEY FINDINGS

- **In order to improve long-term reputation, an institution must first evaluate its current image, goals, and how these elements relate to brand.** A brand should encapsulate how an institution intends to be perceived by various stakeholders, such as prospective students, legislators and the general public. Within an institution, a brand can also provide a sense of values, culture, and vision to current students and employees.
- **Effective rebranding goes deeper than colors and logos.** Developing a brand identity requires institutions to critically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and to create strategies for improving over time. This process helps institutions recognize their position in the higher education landscape, distill its strengths and unique offerings, and construct new ways to communicate and deliver these features to stakeholders.
- **Institutions must deliver on their brand promise.** Specifically, a brand should be consistent with the lived experience of students, faculty, and other stakeholders at the institution. An institution that delivers on its brand promise will build positive, long-term relationships with its constituents, and these relationships help the institution build reputation over time.
- **Institutional reputation correlates with brand awareness.** An institution with a good reputation, but little brand awareness outside its internal community, is missing opportunities to connect with a broader base of potential students, donors, and funding agencies. While traditional marketing methods such as direct mail and print ads remain popular, many institutions report increasing spending on social media marketing and email marketing to reach a broader audience.

- **Redeveloping an institutional brand often involves significant challenges, with cost and faculty resistance being the most common.**
 - Actively involving faculty and staff through the entire rebranding process, including transparent conversations about how cost relates to expected outcomes, typically results in collaborative and successful campaigns.
 - Research suggests a strong correlation between student enrollment decisions and institutional image, indicating that a rebranding effort holds potential long-term value. However, given the probable financial investment, an institution should carefully consider whether its internal communications and marketing team has the resources to undertake such an initiative, or if it should consider external consultants.

SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, Hanover presents a literature review of relevant topics related to reputation and brand recognition in higher education. The section begins with a general discussion of foundational concepts and trends related to reputation and branding. Then, the section presents models and strategies for branding and strategic positioning in colleges and universities. Finally, Hanover considers potential challenges associated with implementing a plan to change an institution's brand perception or reputation.

REPUTATION AND BRANDING

In an increasingly competitive market for higher education, it is not surprising that many colleges and universities have turned their attention evaluating their reputation and brand perception among prospective students and employers. The idea of brand management has its roots in the corporate world, where companies develop branding strategies to compete for prospective customers, clients, and employees who have a wide range of options to choose from. Similarly, higher education institutions must remain conscious of how they present and communicate their educational services, differentiate themselves from other institutions, and how these factors influence the outward reputation and perception of their institution.¹

Before engaging in a discussion of how higher education institutions may improve their reputation, it is important to define a few key terms: image, reputation, and brand. An institution's **image** consists of the "immediate impressions" associated with an institution at a point in time.² Image creation occurs through short-term interactions with an institution that frame an individual's "beliefs, ideas, feelings, and impressions" about that institution.³ In contrast, **reputation** is a long-term concept composed of past images of an institution over time. Reputation builds on an individual's direct experience with an institution, or by information communicated intermediaries, such as media sources and industry organizations.⁴ Finally, an institution's **brand** encapsulates how it would like to be perceived by stakeholders such as prospective students, legislators and the general public.⁵ Within an institution, a brand can also provide a sense of values, culture, and vision to current

¹ Lockwood, R. and J. Hadd. "Building a Brand in Higher Education." *Business Journal*, 2007.

<http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/28081/building-a-brand-in-higher-education.aspx>

² Harrison-Walker, L. "Strategic Positioning in Higher Education." *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 13:1, 2009. p. 105. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/214228153?accountid=132487>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Finch, D., S. McDonald, and J. Staple. "Reputational Interdependence: An Examination of Category Reputation in Higher Education." *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 23:1, 2013. pp. 35-36. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08841241.2013.810184#.VJRavV4AVk>

⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

students and employees.⁶ The brand statement, however, is different from an institutional mission or vision statement, although the two are usually related.⁷

In order to improve reputation over the long term, an institution must first evaluate its current image, goals, and how these relate to its brand. Branding initiatives in higher education often focus on marketing materials, redesigning the logo, and other “superficial” aspects of university image.⁸ As one branding consultant explained:⁹

Florida Atlantic University is getting branded. They've got feedback from 1,500 people, and they are deciding on colors . . . and mascots . . . and this only took 16 focus groups and 200 opinions on ways to improve the colors and logos. What's missing in this story? Any mention of the quality of education or customer experience.

While aesthetic rebranding may be an important step in updating an institution’s image, higher education experts recommend deeper changes within the institution, which will be more effective at building an improved reputation over the long term.¹⁰ Higher education scholar Paul Temple explains that logos and colors are just the “tip of the iceberg” and that a university’s brand should “emerge as a function of how well the institution performs in meeting the needs of its clients: it is the *result* of effective marketing and consequential changes in activities, rather than its *basis*.”¹¹

BRAND PROMISE

Branding in higher education is closely linked to the idea of “brand promise.” **Brand promise** is the actualization of the brand message communicated to stakeholders of an institution, including students, employees, alumni, and funding agencies. It is the “expression” of what stakeholders can expect from their interactions with the institution over time.¹² Dr. Jim Black, President and CEO of a strategic enrollment management firm, argues that **“delivering on the promise of the brand is the single most important aspect of branding a higher education institution.”**¹³

⁶ Williams, R. and M. Omar. “Applying Brand Management to Higher Education Through the Use of the Brand Flux Bodel: The Case of Arcadia University.” *American Marketing Association*, Winter 2013. p. 238
<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=33&sid=13b16540-898b-43e1-9392-439dea087549%40sessionmgr4004&hid=4112>.

⁷ Rodgers, J. and M. Jackson. “Are We Who We Think We Are: Evaluating Brand Promise at a Liberal-Arts Institution.” *Innovative Higher Education*, 37, 2012.
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=5b381509-1273-4e1b-83dd-38467ea9c4c6%40sessionmgr112&hid=105>

⁸ Matthews, D. “Branding-Wise, It’s Pound-Foolish.” *Times Higher Education*, January 5, 2012.
<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/branding-wise-its-pound-foolish/418600.article>

⁹ Lockwood and Hadd, Op. cit.

¹⁰ [1] Ibid. [2] Matthews, Op. cit.

¹¹ Emphasis added. Temple, P. “Branding in Higher Education: Illusion or Reality?” *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 10:1, 2006.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=19495403&site=ehost-live>

¹² Rodgers and Jackson, Op. cit., p. 154.

¹³ Black, J. “The Branding of Higher Education.” SEM Works, 2008. http://www.semworks.net/papers/wp_The-Branding-of-Higher-Education.pdf

Although some higher education administrators and faculty do not think that their institution has a “brand,” Black suggests that these institutions simply are not managing their brand. The idea of a university “brand” is often met with mixed reviews, especially critiques emanating from faculty members concerned over the commercialization of higher education. Some may conceive of a brand as a primarily superficial marketing concept. However, there are many benefits to an institutional assessment of image and brand as they relate to reputation. When executed with care, this process can provide a “clear-eyed assessment” of an institution’s position in the higher education landscape, distill its strengths and unique offerings, and identify new ways to communicate and deliver these features to stakeholders.

Similar to a mission statement, the brand statement can help bring a sense of focus to an institution. Developing a brand statement requires institutions to evaluate their strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for improving the institution over time. As the chief communications officer at the University of Akron explained, “institutional branding is

“Institutional branding is meant to help propel an institution from its mission to its vision by creatively conveying the powerful strategy that will take it from where it is to where it wants to go.”

meant to help propel an institution from its mission to its vision by creatively conveying the powerful strategy that will take it from where it is to where it wants to go.”¹⁴ However, developing a brand and delivering on the promise of that brand requires a “tightly integrated, promise-driven, and planned approach.”¹⁵

Rodgers and Jackson, two institutional assessment and strategic planning scholars in higher education, suggest that an institution that delivers on its brand promise will build positive, long-term relationships with consumers.¹⁶ Therefore, an institution that is seeking to improve its reputation might focus on a thoroughly planned and executed branding strategy to strengthen its position over time.

APPLIED MODELS FOR BRANDING AND STRATEGIC POSITIONING

There are many ways for higher education institutions to develop and implement a branding strategy. This section presents two applied models that a university may use to implement brand development. The first approach takes a business-oriented focus, with a six-step process on how to strategically position a higher education institution among competitors. The second model provides a more comprehensive perspective on both promotion and delivery of a brand promise in higher education.

¹⁴ “50 Best Branding Ideas.” *University Business*, December 2010. <http://www.universitybusiness.com/article/50-best-branding-ideas>

¹⁵ Black, Op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁶ Rodgers and Jackson, Op. cit.

HARRISON-WALKER STRATEGIC POSITIONING MODEL

L. Jean Harrison-Walker of the University of Houston—Clear Lake believes that the concept of positioning in higher education has a close relationship with institutional brand and reputation. **Positioning** is “how [an institution] is perceived in the minds of consumers, relative to competitors.”¹⁷ Both position and reputation are long-term concepts that cannot change quickly or easily. However, unlike reputation, positioning takes a decidedly comparative focus that must consider the competitive landscape of similar higher education institutions.¹⁸

Institutions should consider four basic marketing components that influence positioning, the “four Ps of marketing.”¹⁹

- Product (academic services);
- Price (tuition and financial aid);
- Promotion (marketing and communications); and
- Place (Delivery system of academic services, such as school size, class size, and student-to-faculty ratio).

Institutions can use each of these four concepts as points of comparison with others in the same competitive landscape. After an institution identifies its competitors, it should also consider its position in relation to competitor institutions based on their associated attributes (e.g., formal or friendly, safe or vulnerable), user groups (e.g., non-traditional students, party school, scholars), and use contexts (e.g., gateway to graduate school, technical focus).²⁰

An institution should also evaluate its student base, as some student populations will perceive the same institution differently than others. Taking a business perspective, Harrison-Walker notes that “because choosing a position is generally tied to the target market decision, an economic analysis that takes into account the potential size of each segment, the probability of penetration, and the projected contribution dollars that may be derived from each segment should be conducted.”²¹

After evaluating these areas, an institution develops a positioning statement that is feasible to execute over the long term and targets the desired student population. For example, an institution that positions itself as valuing close student-faculty interaction would not want to drastically increase class sizes in the near future.²² Harrison-Walker identifies six possible angles a higher education institution might use to position itself among peers. Figure 1.1 presents corporate and higher education examples of each positioning angle.

¹⁷ Harrison-Walker, Op. cit., p. 105.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Bulleted points adapted nearly verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 105-106.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 109.

²² Ibid.

Figure 1.1. Walker-Harrison Model Approaches for Positioning

ANGLE	CORPORATE EXAMPLE	HIGHER EDUCATION EXAMPLE
Position by Attribute	Charmin is the soft bathroom tissue.	Brown University is the relaxed, open-minded Ivy League college.
Position by Use	Nyquil is the night-time cold medicine.	Cornell University is the university-of-choice for hotel administration majors.
Position by Product Category	I Can't Believe It's Not Butter positions itself as butter.	The University of Phoenix is a corporate university that positions itself as a member of the traditional university community.
Position by Price/Quality	Grey Poupon distinguishes itself as a top of the line mustard; Malt-o-Meal is recognized as the economy brand cereal.	The University of Michigan is referred to as the "Harvard of the West" for its academic rigor and high tuition.
Competitive Positioning	Avis positioned itself as the "number two" rental car company to associate itself with Hertz as the number one competitor. They claimed that as number two, they would try harder to please the customer.	Marion College changed its name to Indiana Wesleyan University to associate itself with other elite Wesleyan universities in the country.

Source: Harrison-Walker²³

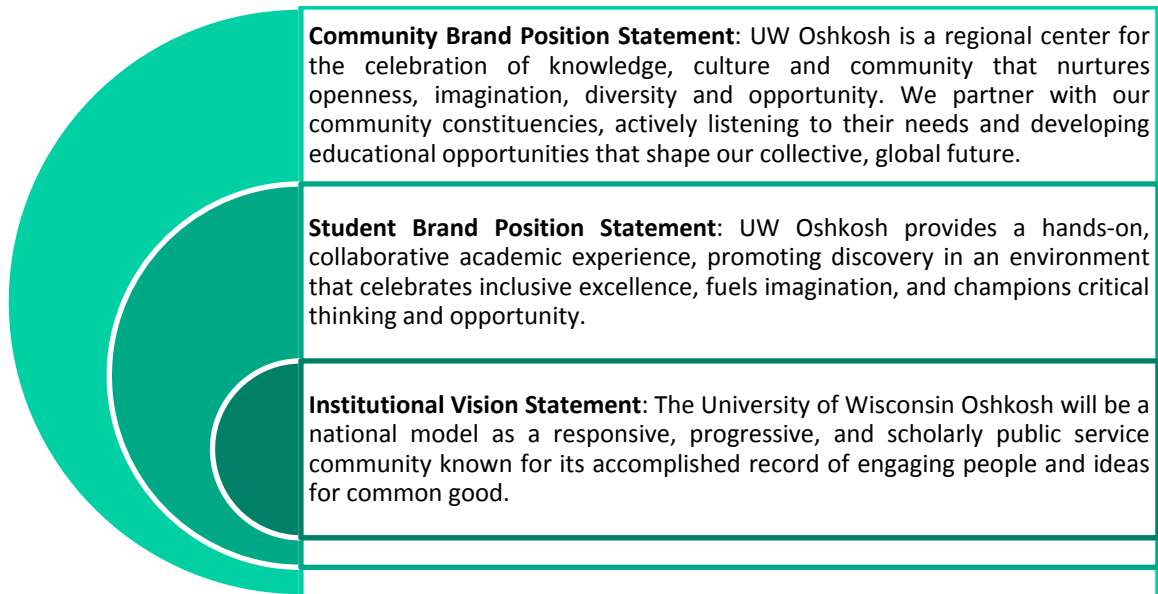
Harrison-Walker warns against the use of "multiple positions" in an attempt to "be all things to all people," as this can weaken an institution's position overall. Instead, a higher education institution should focus on developing a clear, unique, and well-communicated brand position for its target audience.²⁴ However, some institutions may find a single brand promise or positioning statement to be too constraining or unrealistic. For example, the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh decided that its institutional mission and vision statements did not translate easily into one brand position. As such, the institution developed brand position statements for each of its key constituencies. The resulting brand statements for the student population and the university community are in Figure 1.2 along with the institutional vision statement that was the foundational piece.²⁵

²³ Figure adapted nearly verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 106-107.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 107.

²⁵ Ceman, J. "Brand Marketing in Higher Education." Integrated Marketing and Communications, University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh, 2013. <http://www.uwosh.edu/deptblogs/imc/>

Figure 1.2: University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh Brand Promise Statements



BLACK'S BRANDING MODEL

Black proposes a 10-step methodology for developing and delivering a brand promise within higher education. There is some overlap between Harrison-Walker's positioning strategies and Black's branding model, including an internal assessment of stakeholder needs, identifying target market segments, and positioning relative to potential competitors. Black also offers additional guidance to institutions as they begin to develop, promote, and deliver their brand, presented in Figure 1.33 and Figure 1.44.²⁶

One of the first steps Black suggests for developing a brand that can positively impact an institution's reputation over time is assessment of "constituents," or university stakeholders, such as prospective students.

Next, an institution should identify what target populations it would like to attract, and how its strengths align with motivators to attend for the selected population. Once the institution has identified its strengths, it can consider its brand positioning and how to communicate these attributes in a way that will differentiate it from competitor institutions. It is important to consider what communication channels will be most effective for the target population, and what resources are needed to implement brand promotion.

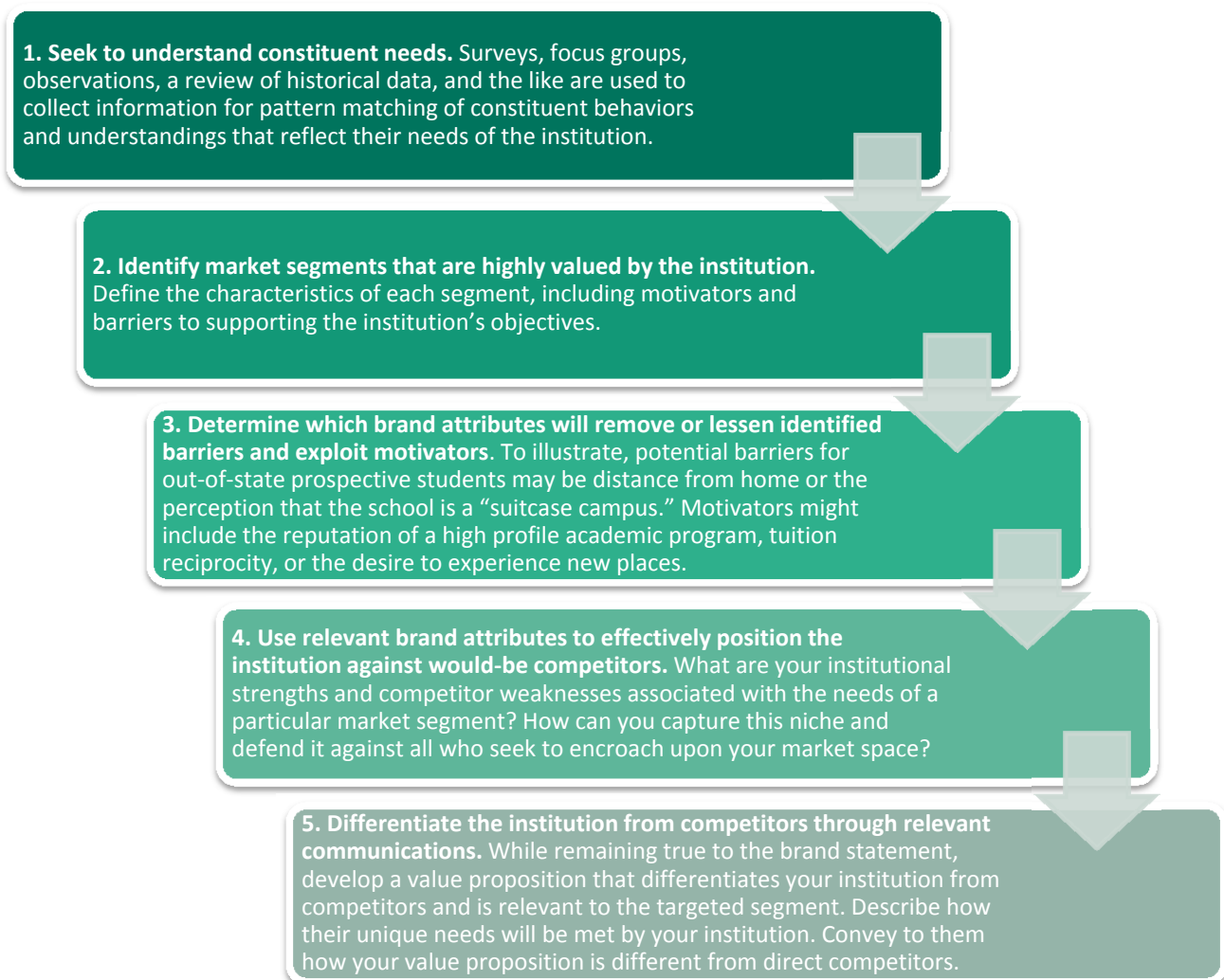
Moreover, Black emphasizes the need for ongoing brand monitoring and a system for evaluating the effectiveness of the brand message and promotional tactics over time.²⁷ For example, a 2011 study on brand perception at a small, private, liberal arts institution sought to measure brand perception among freshman and senior students and how it

²⁶ Black, Op. cit.

²⁷ Black, Op. cit., p. 6.

aligned with how the institution (administrators, faculty, and staff) perceived itself. The study was administered through student surveys from the institutional research office. The results helped gauge whether the institution’s brand strategy was communicating the intended message to stakeholders, and how the institution might alter marketing and other approaches to better communicate the desired message.²⁸

Figure 1.3: Black’s Five Steps for Brand Promotion



Source: Black²⁹

Black also provides five steps for delivering on the brand promise, presented in Figure 1.4. Primarily, the brand developed should be consistent with the lived experience of students, faculty, and other stakeholders at the institution.³⁰ However, “living the brand” can be one

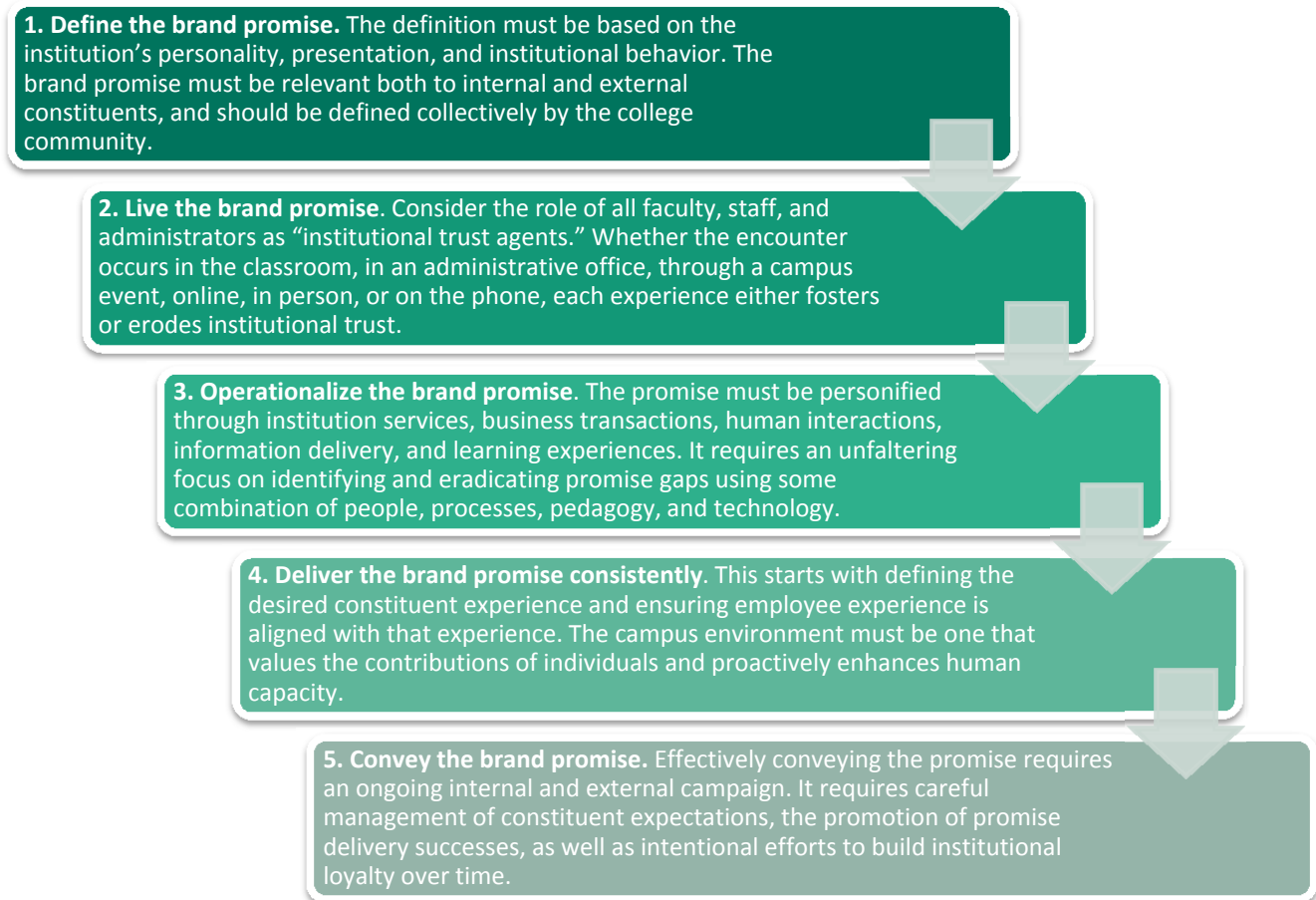
²⁸ Rodgers and Jackson, Op. cit.

²⁹ Figure adapted nearly verbatim from, Black, Op. cit., p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid.

of the most challenging parts of the branding strategy, so institutions should set realistic goals that can be maintained over the long term to positively impact reputation.³¹

Figure 1.4: Black’s Five Steps for Delivering Brand Promise



Source: Black³²

The brand promise should also be relevant to both internal and external stakeholders. Internal support of the university brand is vital, as employees are the “institutional trust agents” that deliver on the brand promise through their consistent daily interactions with students and other stakeholders.³³ Black suggests that a positive employee work environment that aligns with the overall desired brand experience will help ensure that the delivery of the brand promise occurs in all university interactions.

Finally, an internal and external campaign for the brand promise will communicate the institution’s values and goals and build loyalty among stakeholders. It is important that the faculty and staff at the institution understand the reasoning behind the branding initiative

³¹ Ceman, Op. cit.

³² Figure adapted nearly verbatim from, Ibid., pp. 7-9.

³³ Black, Op. cit., p. 8.

and how it is connect to a plan for “systemic institutional change,” rather than just a surficial marketing exercise.³⁴

INCREASING BRAND AWARENESS

Institutional reputation also relates to brand awareness. An institution with a strong reputation, but weak brand awareness outside its internal community, is missing opportunities to connect with a broader based of potential students, donors, and funding agencies.³⁵ A 2012 survey of higher education marketing professionals by CUNet revealed that “brand recognition” was one of the top five marketing priorities in higher education, with over 55 percent of institutions indicating this as a top priority.³⁶ Other top marketing priorities for higher education included increasing enrollment yield, recruiting higher-quality students, and increasing the number of applications.³⁷

In recent years, institutions have increasingly incorporated online marketing and outreach efforts to communicate information about their institution to a broader audience.³⁸ The 2012 CUNet survey suggested that 84 percent of higher education institutions do not believe that traditional marketing methods alone can meet their institutional needs.³⁹ However, traditional marketing methods are still popular, with about 65 percent of responding institutions reporting that they had plans to maintain or increase spending on direct mail and print ads in the coming year (Figure 1.5). Among online marketing techniques, most institutions reported maintaining or increasing their spending on social media marketing and email marketing (Figure 1.6).

About 84 percent of higher education institutions do not believe that traditional marketing methods alone can meet their institutional needs.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁵ Qureshi, Z. “Higher Education Marketing: Awareness and Reputation.” Elliance, 2013. <http://aha.elliance.com/2013/07/29/higher-education-marketing-awareness-and-reputation/>

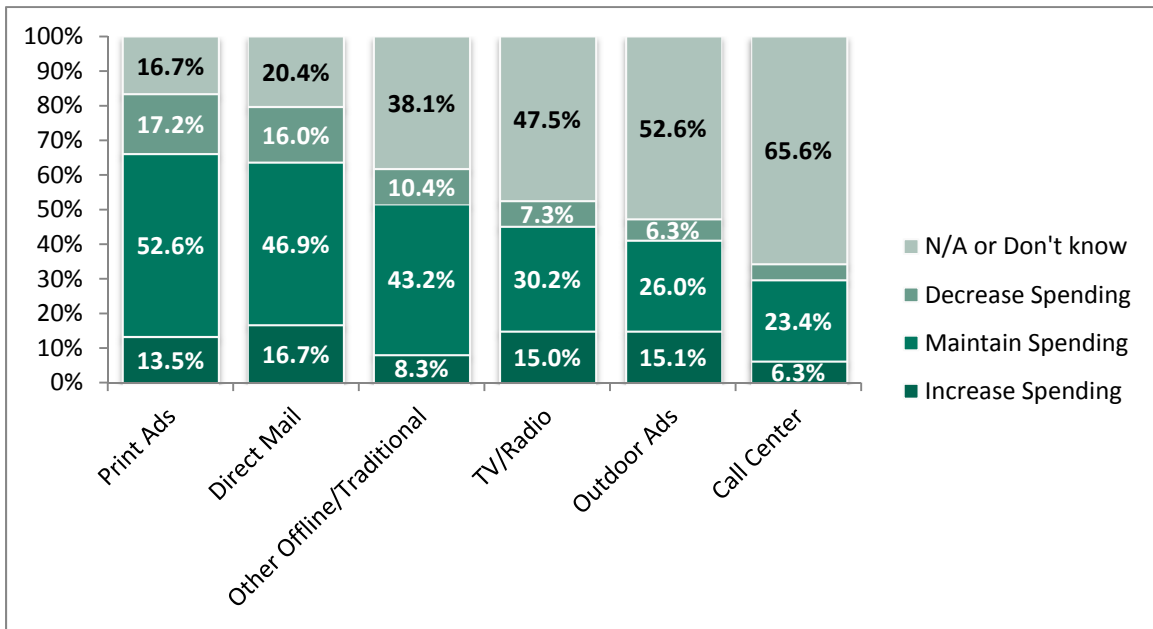
³⁶ “2012 Higher Education Marketing Benchmarking Report: Not-for-Profit Schools.” CUNet, 2012. p. 10. http://www.cunet.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/CUnet_Benchmark_Report_2012_Non_Profit_for_distribution.pdf

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ [1] Qureshi, Op. cit. [2] Lee, F. “Increase University Brand Awareness: Shareable Content.” *Higher Ed Marketing Journal*, January 16, 2014. <http://higheredmarketingjournal.com/increase-university-brand-awareness-shareable-content/>

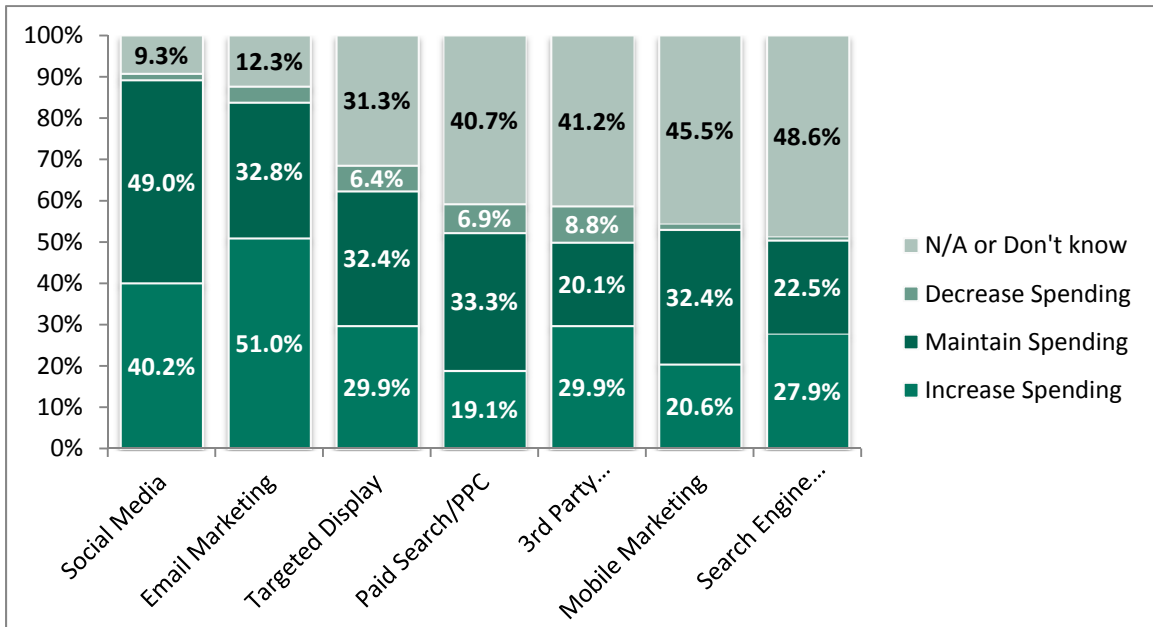
³⁹ “2012 Higher Education Marketing Benchmarking Report: Not-for-Profit Schools,” Op. cit., p. 4.

Figure 1.5: Shifts in Spending on Offline/Traditional Marketing Methods, 2012



Source: CUNet⁴⁰

Figure 1.6: Shifts in Spending on Online Marketing Methods, 2012



Source: CUNet⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 7.

Additional survey research in 2014 by QS Top Universities on how students seek information about college and universities revealed that on a global scale, students are using multiple devices, such as laptops and smartphones, to research universities.⁴² An institution's website should be adaptive with a wide variety of device types in order to be easily accessible to prospective students. However, according to this survey, **about two-thirds of respondents value online and offline information resources equally.** Moreover, while prospective students used social media frequently, it ranks as a less important resource for information about institutions overall. Students reported that social media was a source of "inspiration" about institutions, but ranking websites were most commonly used when comparing universities.

Elliance, a higher education marketing company, suggests that a "clear brand focus" and a "quality website" are an essential start to strengthening an institution's brand awareness and reputation.⁴³ Beyond this, Elliance also recommends that any content development and social media generated by the institution through avenues such as blogs, press releases, and social media posts should have a clear purpose. This content should "engage users in a dialog and encourage conversations."⁴⁴ Sharable content, amplified through clicks, "likes," and user comments, can serve the dual purpose of engaging prospective students and increasing brand awareness.⁴⁵

CHALLENGES WITH REBRANDING

FACULTY BUY-IN

There are significant challenges associated with developing or altering a college or university brand, most notably faculty resistance and the high costs of developing and implementing a branding strategy. There is no shortage of editorials and commentary by higher education faculty opposing branding in higher education institutions. In fact, many higher education marketing guides warn against using the words "brand" or "branding" when discussing changes within a university to avoid backlash from employees. Faculty may argue that the branding process:⁴⁶

- "Hawks" dignified universities as commercial products;
- Reduces a complicated institution into simplistic pictures and slogans;
- Makes unrealistic or outlandish claims;
- Is a product of the administration and outsiders, not faculty; or
- Diverts money that could be better spent on pressing issues.

⁴² "Students Online: Global Trends, How Do Prospective Students Use Digital Resources to Research Higher Education?" *QS Top Universities*, July 2014. p. 5. <http://www.topuniversities.com/system/files/pdf-uploads/Students-Online-Global-Trends-2014.pdf>

⁴³ Qureshi, Op. cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lee, Op. cit.

⁴⁶ Bulleted points taken nearly verbatim from: Perlmutter, D. "Your College Needs a Brand. Help Create It." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 21, 2014. <http://chronicle.com/article/Your-College-Needs-a-Brand/146099/>

One way to smooth the path toward a branding strategy within a higher education institution is to involve faculty and staff in the development and implementation process. From the start, soliciting feedback from faculty and staff and encouraging participation in workshops as the branding process progresses can help build consensus and allay concerns.⁴⁷ For example, when the University of Cincinnati began updating its branding strategies, it periodically presented updates to “key groups” on campus, such as the Faculty Senate, to keep them informed throughout the planning process. Moreover, the communications department provided informational packets to all employees and asked for feedback. The associate vice president for external relations at the University of Cincinnati explained:⁴⁸

When we launched our first big ad campaign, we sent out a mailer to all employees and got some immediate negative feedback from some faculty about what we might be spending. But when we explained that the goal was to build a better reputation for UC and showcase the great work that our faculty and students were doing, they became our proponents.

While faculty may initially be reluctant to join, it may help to frame the initiative in terms other than “branding.” One higher education marketing expert explained that he may speak in academic terms, such as “uncovering the college’s ‘genetic code’” or citing Plato’s concept of “knowing thyself.”⁴⁹ These approaches get at the core concepts of developing an institutional identity while circumventing more overt marketing terms.

HIGH COST OF BRAND CAMPAIGNS

Branding initiatives often come with a high price tag and such marketing efforts are increasingly common, with the amount of money allocated for marketing in higher education in the United States more than doubling since 2000. Some brand campaigns can cost in excess of \$1 million, with UCLA spending about \$1.25 million and the University of Maryland spending over \$5 million on marketing campaigns in recent years.⁵⁰ Even Wheelock College, a small institution in Boston with an enrollment of less than 1,000 students, spent over \$500,000 on its most recent branding campaign intent on changing its perception as an all-female institution with a narrow focus on child-centric vocations.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Forsythe-Crane, J. “Consider Fostering Widespread Buy-In to Branding and Marketing.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 8, 2014. <http://chronicle.com/blogs/letters/consider-fostering-widespread-buy-in-to-branding-and-marketing/>

⁴⁸ Blumenstyk, G. “Good Research and Faculty Buy-In: 2 Keys to Effective Marketing.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 25, 2008. <http://chronicle.com/article/Good-ResearchFaculty/30925/>

⁴⁹ Gardner, L. “The Upside of Selling Your Soul.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 29, 2014. <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Upside-of-Selling-Your/149019/>

⁵⁰ Aronczyk, M. and D. Powers. *Blowing Up the Brand: Critical Perspectives on Promotional Culture*. 2010. p. 207. <https://books.google.com/books?id=sFlko-CwZAsC&pg=PA207&lpg=PA207&dq=expensive+university+branding+campaign&source=bl&ots=IfPFMQpazq&sig=hKZfVUoLddMesm4pcSmWA2unnBw&hl=en&sa=X&ei=cMWmVOK9CZPfggTRroPwBg&ved=0CDcQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=expensive%20university%20branding%20campaign&f=false>

⁵¹ Tyson, C. “In Your Face.” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 11, 2014. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/07/11/boston-institutions-try-grab-attention-provocative-marketing-efforts>

Some institutions worry that such expensive campaigns often focus on superficial changes such as logos and color palettes and lack long-term results. This is why many experts encourage institutions to undertake a more comprehensive internal review of institutional identity and goals for the future, and to align these fundamental aspects into the presentation of the institution in marketing and communications.⁵² Institutions should also carefully consider whether its internal communications and marketing team has the resources to undertake a branding initiative, or if it should consider external consultants.

In light of past research connecting college choice with image and reputation, the benefits of institutional branding may be well-worth the cost. One study, for instance, identified “image or reputation” as one of the four major factors considered by prospective college students in their matriculation decisions. Another study investigating college selection determined that “reputation” and “academics” were the two most important factors in the college decision process.⁵³

⁵² Matthews, Op. cit.

⁵³ Judson, K. et al. “Building a University Brand from Within: University Administrators’ Perspectives of Internal Branding.” *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 30, 2008. p. 58.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15332960802467722>

SECTION II: PROFILES

CALVIN COLLEGE

Calvin College is a liberal arts institution located in Grand Rapids, Michigan with an enrollment of about 4,000 undergraduate students. While the College previously relied on its association with the Christian Reformed Church to attract students—at one point about 90 percent of its student body were members of this denomination—it has recently had to broaden its recruitment efforts as a result of overall declining membership in the Christian Reformed Church.⁵⁴ In 2014, Calvin College administrators decided that, in conjunction with developing a new strategic planning document and mission statement, the institution should consider a new branding strategy to meet its evolving challenges.

The college community understood that the institution needed to improve its marketing efforts to reach more students, but many faculty members worried about the costs, how the institution might be portrayed, and the effects of “market-driven change” on the institution’s liberal arts roots.⁵⁵ However, in its current state, one consultant observed that “what [Calvin College] held most dear was not well articulated to the public, and that its caution and consensus-driven nature were, in some ways, strengths but were not well suited to 21st-century higher education.”⁵⁶

In a process similar to how the institution redefined its mission statement, consultants led some of the first workshops to discuss the branding process in September and October of 2014. The provost announced opportunities for faculty involvement in *The Academic Bulletin*.⁵⁷

Faculty significantly influence how the college communicates its identity to prospective students, donors, and other external audiences. The branding consultants are eager to hear from at least 1 in 3 faculty members. Please sign up today for a workshop on September 22–24 and/or October 13–15.

- **The September workshops will focus on the college’s personality** and the things that attract people to Calvin. Sign up for these workshops here.
- **The October workshops will focus on clarifying Calvin’s key messages** and how those are communicated relative to our various audiences and competition. Sign up for these workshops here.

The institution held student, faculty, and staff workshops separately during this three day series, with two fully integrated sessions throughout the process. During workshops, small groups worked to identify aspects of the institution’s “personality” and brainstorm short

⁵⁴ Gardner, Op. cit.

⁵⁵ Gardner, L. “A Small College Sells Marketing to Its Cautious Faculty.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 29, 2014. <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Small-College-Sells/149015/>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Text box taken verbatim from: “The Academic Bulletin.” Office of the Provost of Calvin College, September 12, 2014. <http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/bulletin/2014-15/140912.pdf>

phrases that would encapsulate this essence.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the institution would like to involve at least one third of the faculty and staff and about 10 percent of the student body in “formal branding exercises.”⁵⁹ Similar workshops, scheduled in coming months, will keep stakeholders informed and involved in the branding process.⁶⁰

The leader of the Faculty Senate at the institution notes that the faculty at Calvin are coming to realize that marketing is “a necessity, even if you’re going to have faculty rolling their eyes a little bit.” Moreover, some faculty are looking at the branding process as an opportunity for self-study, where the institution can examine “what’s really fundamental, what’s really essential, and from that place, how we can respond to new market realities.”⁶¹

ARCADIA UNIVERSITY

Arcadia University began as Beaver College, founded in 1853 as a small women’s college in Beaver, Pennsylvania. The institution was opened to male students in 1973, but by 1985 the institution was suffering from “chronic financial instability/over-reliance on tuition model,” and was close to losing its Pell grant eligibility.⁶² In order to improve its position, Beaver College undertook efforts to increase its market share and academic prestige through “refreshed web sites and viewbooks, open houses, updated facilities (new dorms and athletic facilities), and other tactics” through the late 1980s and into the late 1990s. By 2000, enrollments had doubled, academic admissions standards were stronger, and the college’s academic reputation had grown.

However, despite its progress, administrators felt that the college’s name was holding it back. It was a source of “ridicule in the form of derogatory remarks pertaining to the rodent” and other critiques, and internal research at the institution suggested that it had 30 percent fewer prospective students based on the appeal of its name alone.⁶³ Moreover, while the institution had largely depended on word-of-mouth advertising, a shrinking local market necessitated attracting students from outside its traditional recruitment area.⁶⁴ After “revitalizing, rebranding, and repositioning activities were no longer able to meet the strategic goals” of the institution, Beaver College carefully considered changing its name.⁶⁵

The institution surveyed over 20,000 alumni, students, parents, faculty, and staff about the name change and potential alternatives. Arcadia was the “clear winner” for its association with ancient Greece and a thoughtful, peaceful learning environment.⁶⁶ However, the name

⁵⁸ Stawecki, T. “Calvin Begins Rebranding Process.” *Chimes: Calvin College*, October 4, 2014. <http://www.calvin.edu/chimes/2014/10/04/calvin-begins-rebranding-process/>

⁵⁹ Gardner, “The Upside of Selling Your Soul,” Op. cit.

⁶⁰ Stawecki, Op. cit.

⁶¹ Gardner, “A Small College,” Op. cit.

⁶² Williams and Omar, Op. cit., p. 252.

⁶³ Todt, R. “Beaver College Announces New Name.” *ABC News*, November 20, 2001. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=94962>

⁶⁴ Williams and Omar, Op. cit., p. 253.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 252.

⁶⁶ Todt, Op. cit.

change was not to be just a superficial change. The institution elevated itself to “university” status by the state of Pennsylvania at this time to reflect growth and the creation of three major divisions within the institution, including a graduate division.⁶⁷ It also sought to distance itself from its historical reputation as a women’s college.⁶⁸ Then-president Bette Landman further explained:⁶⁹

All our achievements, including internationally recognized study abroad programs, a respected graduate curriculum, and remarkable growth in academics and campus facilities made it clear that a new name was needed to describe more accurately what is, in many ways, a new institution.

Renaming the institution was not the end of the rebranding process however. Higher education marketing experts Williams and Omar explain that reinforcement of a brand is integral to supporting the transition. Arcadia University planned to continue evaluating and realigning its “strategic advertising” for four years after the name change to support the realignment of the institutions reputation.⁷⁰ Publicizing the name change helped to honor the institution’s heritage, but also emphasize the significance of the change.⁷¹ Williams and Omar note that a strategy that monitors brand health will revitalize, refocus, and if necessary, rename a brand over time. Such branding decisions, small or large, should be reinforced in communications and marketing to maintain brand health.⁷²

⁶⁷ [1] Williams and Omar, Op. cit., p. 252. [2] Todt, Op. cit.

⁶⁸ Finder, A. “To Woo Students, College Choose Names that Sell.” *The New York Times*, August 11, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/11/education/11names.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

⁶⁹ “Beaver College Set to Become Arcadia University; Historic Campus Ceremony On July 16 Will Celebrate Change; Thousands to Participate Via Web Cast.” PRNewswire, July 16, 2001. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/beaver-college-set-to-become-arcadia-university-historic-campus-ceremony-on-july-16-will-celebrate-change-thousands-to-participate-via-web-cast-71346452.html>

⁷⁰ Williams and Omar, Op. cit., p. 254.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 254-255.

⁷² Ibid., p. 255.

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