10 Ways to Successfully Brand Your University

by Erika Solis, 05/31/19

We don't really see universities as businesses, but they do have to market themselves to their target audience just like any other company. Without marketing and effective graphic design, a university can't survive on its own. Even large, established colleges will continue to promote themselves to new and interested audiences. To successfully advertise your university branding, different aspects of designs are needed. From color swatches to video transitions, visuals are extremely important to form a message. You want to make sure you have a graphic designer who's ready for anything you need.

To make sure your educational marketing is efficient, look at every angle. If your graphic design is clean, but your website's layout needs work, then start there. You don't need a complete redesign to keep on improving your brand. Odds are, you're not looking to redo your entire university's brand.

However, if you're looking to refine or improve on what you have now, take a look at the top ten ways to effectively market your university.

Logos

Your logo is the most powerful and important university branding decision your school has to make. It's more than just having your name and an image. It's about how you want to define your school to every single audience you're targeting. Every college has a unique logo because they want to look different from others in the area. In a way, every single school in the world is your competition. You want to have your incoming class increase every year to continue growing your school, and one of the first things the high school students see is your logo.

When it comes to designing your school logo, you have options. For older universities, they typically continue their style with minor updates. However, you can opt for a rebranding and change your look all together. Keep in mind this means establishing yourself again to people familiar with you already. One thing to avoid is stereotyping your new logo. Many schools use a crest as their main logo and add a serif font for the name of

the college. While this isn't a bad idea, every school has their own variation of it. Every university has a crest, but it should go hand-in-hand with a separate logo.

Branding
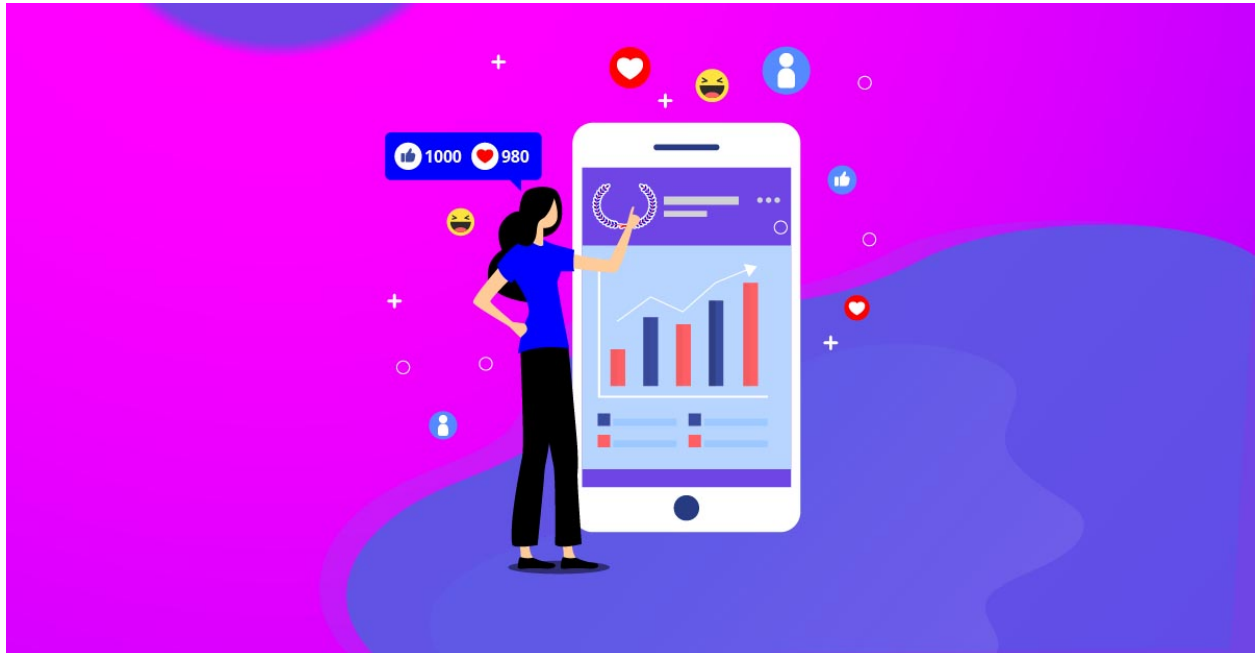
From your logo, you expand into branding as a whole. Even if as an institution of higher learning, you rely on a brand to identify yourself amongst thousands of other schools. Features such as color palettes, fonts, and tone make your university what it is. If your school doesn't have one already, considering creating brand guidelines. This style guide works as a base for anyone to use and understand how to represent your school brand. If someone in the business department decides to look at your university guidelines, then they should know exactly what you want to get across. However, this typically only works visually.

When it comes to the language of your school, you have to stay consistent with your tone. This doesn't mean you have to remain professional and academic at all times. Instead, use it as an opportunity to create an identity. If your school is very artistic and creative, you'll find yourself

having a more relaxed tone. You should still have the authority of a university but maintain a friendly appearance. The goal is to bring prospective students in with your language, not scare them away.

Colors

All branding is important, and colors are no exception. While your palettes are a small part of a larger picture, it can represent your school without a logo or words. These colors are used across different kinds of merchandise and designs to help create an identity. It's common to see schools use one primary color and one metal color. This is more from tradition, but it helps create a contrast between the two selected. One key thing to remember is the impact of the colors will only go so far.

There are only so many colors to choose from, so you'll see some colleges with the exact same palettes. They'll have other secondary colors to choose from, but their main ones are likely the same as other places. If you're lucky, it won't be a school nearby. For example, Rutgers University in New Jersey and the University of Alabama both use similar shades of red and match it with white. However, they can still be associated as themselves in

their own locations because they're so far apart. Meanwhile, Drexel University and Penn State, both based in Pennsylvania, use almost identical blues. It's harder to avoid confusion, and it stands out even less in the area. In university redesigns, some colors are simply updated. For instance, the University of South Florida recently rebranded itself, but instead of picking new colors, its saturated previous ones.

Furthermore, your colors matter because every single color has psychology behind it. When it comes to warm colors, they're very energized. Red, in particular, expresses passion and ambition, two traits you want to see from a university student. When it comes to cool colors, they're easy going and balanced. Blue specifically is popular because it's relaxing and trustworthy. That's why you'll commonly see red or blue with universities. Other colors are used for their own reasons but consider what your colors represent, and if you want to your school to continue with that image.

Social Media
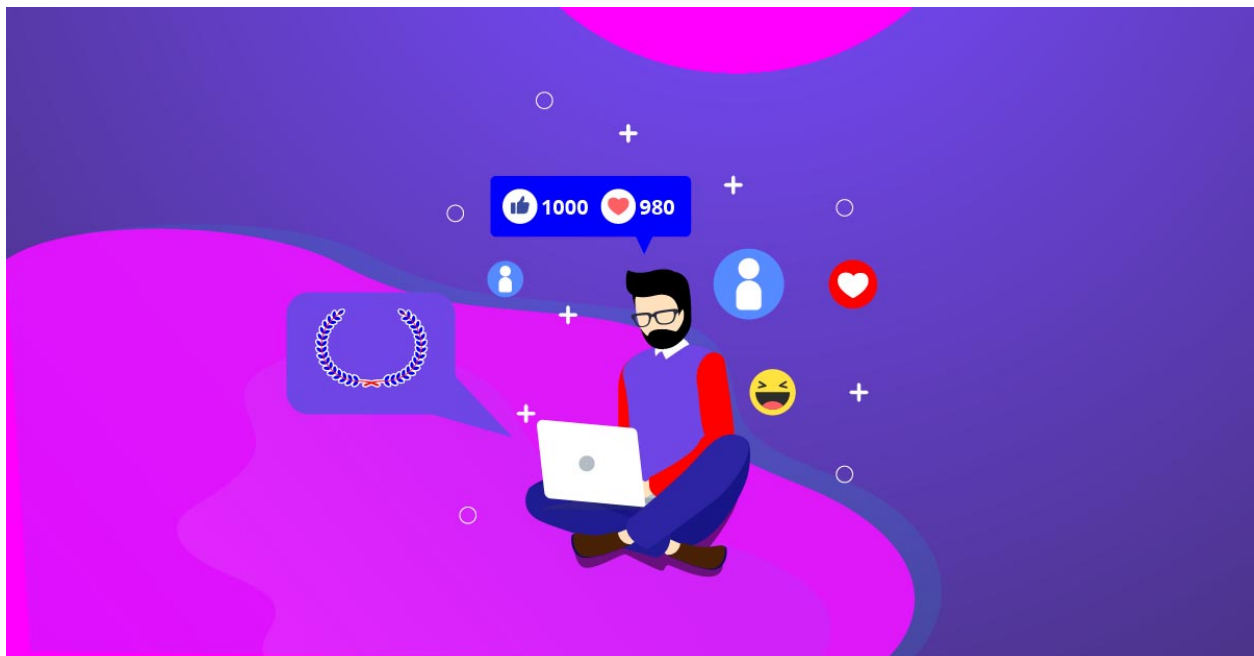
To fully reach the student target market you're looking for, your university needs to be online for students to see. In 2018, nine out of ten teenagers

reported using social media multiple times a day, with the most popular platforms being YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram. It's not enough to just release content online. You have to create something that resonates with this audience, but remain cautious about what you post. There's a fine line between appearing cringy and successfully converting them. This requires research and learning about what teenagers are interested in.

If you don't have the resources to research what's trendy, some universities use students themselves to run social media. This helps keep the school's posts relevant by having your target market create content they'll resonate with. They also have a better understanding of different platforms because they're on it themselves. By recruiting students, you can add your university to platforms you never could before. For instance, Instagram is one of the biggest outlets for students at the moment. Colleges on Instagram use highlights to promote different aspects of themselves such as athletics, events, and graduation. The style and aesthetics come from trial and error of students creating something they'd want to see themselves online. Your university branding is sure to shine here thanks to the multiple features available.

Video

One of the most effective digital marketing tactics is using contrasting forms of video to your advantage. Ever since it became widely spread, it's useful for all aspects of your educational marketing. For example, you can film a tour of a new facility to entice prospective students. If you don't have a new building, consider what part of the campus is rarely shown. The idea of exclusivity is still appealing to your market, so take advantage of it.

Video is useful to show emotions and create a connection with viewers. It's common to see current students talking about their experiences as promotional material. This can be hard-hitting to the right type of prospective student. If they see themselves in there, they're more willing to look into your programs and campus. It helps with university branding because it showcases the population on your campus. Remember, they're part of your image as well. Furthermore, a video has something pictures never will: movement. You can show more angles on a story by using film over using images alone. Some educational website designs and homepages use multiple short clips of the college to quickly explain what to expect from them.

Alumni

There's nothing greater about a university than the students who graduate from your programs and give back. It shows they truly value the staff, professors, and resources your school had to offer. This is a unique type of market because you've already sold your product to them. Whether or not they're happy depends on their own experience and the university's reputation after they graduate. This special audience is important to continue marketing your university.

By continuing to engage your alumni, you can secure a better reputation for your college. Your alumni are a form of university branding because they represent the outcome of your university. This is why many schools focus on specific successful alumni. If they speak well about your university, you're sure to continue increasing your reputation and population. Furthermore, you can use the alumni in your marketing efforts. Using them for your advertising is ideal because it creates some evidence that your institution is effective in success. While college is labeled as one of the best experiences of one's life for the culture and friendships made, we need to continue fueling the statement by having your alumni speak about it first hand. They are your brand.

Recruitment

Before your students become alumni, you need to bring them in with recruiting efforts. Most college recruiting is different from other types because one of the most effective ways continues to be word of mouth and visiting the client directly. This is a unique type of marketing because most industries don't thrive on that model. When it comes to a teenager making a life-changing decision on this scale, they're going other people around them. That's why many universities host college fairs and tours. Not only does it help with university branding, it's to bring in potential students and establish themselves as a trustworthy source of education.

One key factor is to not target one specific kind of student, but as many as possible. Some large universities offer over a hundred different types of majors. Not every single person in each of those majors is the same, but that's the best part about recruiting. You want to have a large unique group of individuals, but the issue at hand is targeting all of them. The best way to do it is by trying different types of marketing strategies and seeing what works. Not every single ad will bring in new students, but that's okay. It might seem like a loss short-term, but you know how to handle it differently in the long-term.

A consistent factor across all of marketing should be your branding. You don't want to look like two completely different institutions because one color looked better than your own color palettes. You have to stick your branding across all platforms. It's something touched on already within this article, but it does need reminding. Everyone should know who you are based on your branding, and the recruitment will work long-term with it.

Online Design
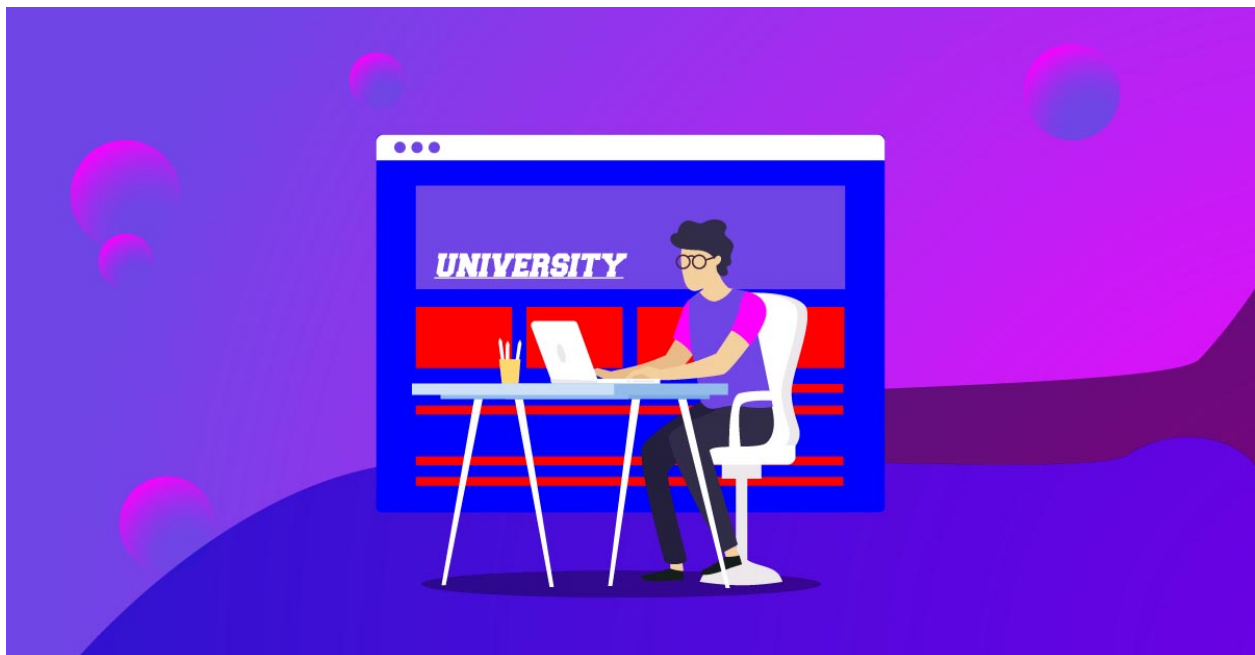
When you open up your university's website, what is the first thing you notice? If it's a mistake in the design, odds are, your audience will catch it too. The last thing you need is for your target to market to get distracted from the message because your links don't work or lead to a dead page. You need to check your code for any possible mistake. If you don't push your site to the limits, then someone else will. You want to catch these bugs as early as possible to make sure the user experience is positive.

From there, your desktop and mobile appearance should complement each other without looking identical. In reality, you don't want them to look

exactly the same because they're not. A desktop is horizontal while a mobile page is vertical. If they did look the same, you'd either lose information on the sides of the page or waste potential space. Aspects of your university branding such as colors, fonts, and page layouts can be almost identical. If you have multiple boxes in a row to list off majors on your desktop site, find a way to make it work on mobile to give it the same impression a desktop user would get. In the end, the layout should work to get your educational information across.

Digital Learning
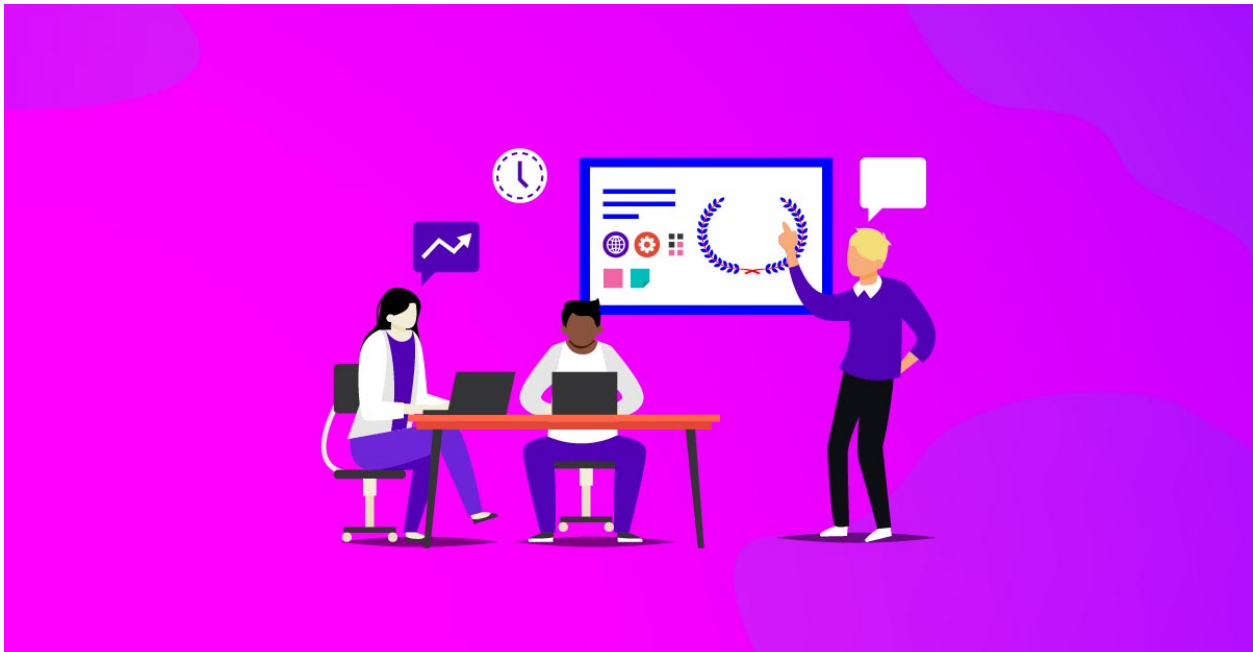
Once students are at your university, you have to find a way to maintain them. You have to keep the students engaged to make sure they continue seeing your institution as the best one. A great way to do this is by adding digital learning to your curriculums. Many schools already use this type of learning, but don't have entire programs dedicated to it. We're moving away from the typical college lifestyle to non-traditional students returning to get their education. These students are usually already working and don't have time to be on campus during the day. If you're

don't have a program dedicated for them specifically, you're losing out on that audience.

While digital learning is on the rise, you don't want to depend on it too heavily. Many students do still yearn for a traditional experience. They're not looking to work on their assignments on a computer all the time. Instead, you need to find a balance between marketing online-only programs and continuing the traditions.

Thinking Ahead

As a higher education institution, your students are looking to you for the future. They depend on your professors and faculty to teach them what's next and trending in their industries. Without your valuable faculty and staff, your students won't be able to work effectively after graduation. It's hard to keep track of the future, but if you want to be respected as a higher education institution, you have to keep moving forward. While this is something that's out of the marketing department's control, you want to put your best foot forward when it comes to sharing it with the public.

If you have a new major or curriculum within your university, it's a great thing to promote to garner interest. If you use local advertising such as billboards and flyers, consider the type of graphics you're using. You're not just trying to get people interested. The goal is for them to take action and see you as an option for their own education. Your university branding should encourage people to look into not only the new topic but the school as a whole.