



BRANDING HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract:

People pursue higher education to better their job prospects, increase their future earning potential, broaden their world view, and educate themselves on topics they're passionate about. Any type of higher education requires a significant investment of both time and money by the student. As a result, potential students can be understandably selective when it comes to choosing an educational institution. This is where higher education branding can help your school stand out. Today, there are more methods of accessing higher education than ever. Students can earn a degree or diploma online or in person, full-time or part-time, overseas, or in their native country. This diversification increases competition among schools. More than ever, educational institutions have to compete for students instead of students competing for admission. Branding has become a critical part of running a successful institution of higher education. Students can choose from thousands of potential colleges, and branding is an important method of encouraging them to choose you. By highlighting the unique aspects of your institution and presenting a consistent, appealing message, you can build a brand that will keep your school relevant to students for years to come.

Introduction

The reforms package of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in the domain of higher education augurs well for its reputation and image. Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) ought to purge themselves of archaic ideas, revamp administration through innovative management practices, make it more responsive, insulate themselves from political interference, enhance the credibility and make the faculty accountable, step up research and offer greater opportunities to the academia. All these initiatives should be done in tandem to face the challenges of globalization, increasing competition between and among state run universities and college across the country. HEIs should embark on a marketing exercise with a steely resolve to carve out a distant place.

The country, which has seen a phenomenal expansion in the number of universities, colleges, enrolment, infrastructure, etc., ought to shore up its image across the world even as it claims to have the human intellectual capital.

While critics carp about lack of quality, infrastructure deficiencies, shortage of faculty in universities, branding higher education in India is yet to gain a toehold. To begin with, it is necessary to take a step back and justify using the concept of the brand in the context of education. There is a general acceptance in the marketing literature that the brand is one of the main assets of an organization (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993; Kapferer, 2004). Also, with the broadening of the marketing concept into social markets (Kotler and Levy, 1969), the range of organizations and markets in which branding has been applied has grown to encompass the church, the Metropolitan marketers as the idea of students as customers is yet to seep into the mindset of the educationists, policy makers, etc. Education has all along been the mission; it was never about the Bottom Line. Undergraduate and graduate schools are

suffering from declining endowments. In this economy, competition is becoming more fierce for students and the need to differentiate is more appreciated.

An impetus behind several branding initiatives for colleges big and small, is an acknowledgement that applicants have so many choices and not every institution is a “Harvard”. The premise is: Harvard would not need to brand itself because after all, it is Harvard, and it can just stand on its name. Of late, Harvard has upped the ante in branding and differentiation. The University recently applied for trademark ownership of the themes/taglines “Managing yourself” and “The world’s thinking.” Harvard has already registered “Ask what you can do” (from President Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural speech)—and “Lessons learned”.

In August, Harvard agreed to license its name for an upscale line of clothing (in order to raise money for financial aid... and build its brand). If Harvard is the Mecca of higher education and success and is now investing more in branding, there are a few more powerful examples to show that College branding is smart and effective.

Coherent communication strategies

Universities and colleges should formulate a coherent and effective communications platform to serve the long-term interest of their identity while meeting more immediate needs for admissions and infrastructure development.

With a brand identity in place, and the energized constituency that comes with it, every school has the opportunity to amplify its voice and connect with the people that make up its current and future community. The following kinds of programmes could be looked into:

Voicing the Institutional

- Market Voicing (SM) Brand Identity Study
- Brand Evaluation and Communication Auditing
- Internal Constituent Discussion Groups and Surveys
- Brand Strategy and Message Platforms
- Visual Identity Design and Photo Image Library Development
- Speech-writing for Convocation, Commencement, and Alumni Outreach

Online Presence

- Home Website the “.edu” site) Content Organization and Design
- Facebook Presence for Student Recruitment and Alumni Engagement
- Interactive Conversational Sites for Distinct Audiences
- Vice-Chancellor and Department Chair Blog Implementation
- Microsites to Support Key Events and Promotions

Video Storytelling

- About students and alumni for recruitment and community building



- Documentaries about special initiatives and research studies
- About institutional impact on neighborhoods, regions and fields of study
- As support to News Postings and Press Releases

Additional Marketing Communications Services

- Communications Support for Development Campaigns
- Constituent Group Training for Brand Stewardship
- External Market Research
- Marketing Communications for Student Recruitment
- Advertising for Print, Broadcast and Online – Concept and Design
- Media Advertising Planning and Placement
- Website and Online Social Networking Programme Development

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