MARKETING PLAN

PRESENTED BY
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Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods (CJRW), and Penn, Schoen & Berland (PSB) have been Missouri State University's marketing partners since 2012. The partnership started with a thorough research study implemented by PSB, which gathered insight from a variety of constituencies such as key administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, graduate students, undergraduate students, prospective non-traditional students, prospective transfer students, admitted students who did not enroll, all prospective high school students, and parents of prospective students.

The in-depth findings of the research study can be found in the "Phase II Quantitative Report," but there are five key findings used as the framework for this marketing plan.

- MSU received positive ratings across all audiences. Key strengths include location, campus offerings, facilities, and value.
- Traditions and school spirit are areas to improve. Additionally, MSU has room to improve its national recognition and brand identity.
- Tagline and mission statement are effective, but awareness is low. After being aided, the tagline and mission boosted interest among prospective audiences.
- Website is viewed positively, but can be further utilized. Many would like to see additional information on upcoming university events; alumni would like to use website to strengthen alumni network.
- Messages resonate strongly and move the needle on key metrics. The messages boost favorability and strength of reputation considerably across key audiences. Results validate messages as a strong basis for future MSU communications efforts.

Research findings and this marketing plan will help MSU recruit a higher number of students, and more academically qualified students. During the Fall 2013 semester, MSU announced a record-breaking enrollment. The institution reported an enrollment of 23,838 students, which is the highest since 2010. While this represents an outstanding success for the university, research findings and this marketing plan will help the university move forward with progressive tactics. The higher education recruiting landscape is becoming more aggressive, as universities compete for a smaller number of students due to the declining size of high school graduating classes. Universities are also crossing state borders with attractive in-state tuition offers in order to attract out-of-state students to supplement in-state shortages.

While recruitment will be an important component of this marketing plan, a cohesive branding strategy will be necessary to elevate and propagate the university's current tagline: "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place." By redefining the meaning of this tagline, MSU will be able to successfully recruit students, motivate faculty and staff to embrace the tagline, and reconnect and reengage with alumni and donors.

All strategies proposed will help MSU achieve three main goals. These statements define how Missouri State University will use marketing to further advance the university's brand, image, recruitment efforts, and internal and external engagement opportunities.

- Redefine meaning of tagline in a way that elevates academic excellence along with key assets defined in research study
- Develop a strategy that will promote campus-wide propagation of "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place" tagline
- Develop a strategy to garner interdepartmental support for the tagline and achieve cohesive visual and written executions

TARGET AUDIENCES

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE TARGET AUDIENCES FOR THE MARKETING PLAN:

RECRUITMENT
- Junior and senior high schools students
- Parents of prospective high school students
- Prospective graduate students
- Prospective transfer students
- Adult students

BRANDING
- Prospective students (all)
- Parents
- Current students
- Faculty (current and prospective)
- Staff (current and prospective)
- Alumni
- General public

The following SWOT analysis is based on research findings, but it also includes feedback provided by faculty and staff members during a two-day discovery session held at MSU.

STRENGTHS
- Location
- Campus offerings and facilities
- Affordability and value

WEAKNESSES
- Brand and national identity
- School spirit and traditions
- Athletics

OPPORTUNITIES
- Variety of programs with regional and national reputation in all colleges
- Key programs that can provide credible claims to innovation
- Majority of classes taught by faculty, not teaching assistants
- Long tradition as an institution that prepares educators
- Personal atmosphere, but large enough to offer a wide variety of opportunities
- Student-to-professor ratio
- Advisement centers
- Internship program
- STEM Institute
- A relatively high percentage of research conducted by undergraduate students in select colleges
- Build-your-own-major opportunities
- Unique study away program
- Living and learning communities
- Proximity to respective feeder markets
- Dedicated corporate relationship specialists
- Existing large recruitment event format
- Unique out-of-the-classroom opportunities in key programs (field school, emergency management class, study abroad)
- Programs available completely online
- 90 percent of faculty members have a Ph.D.
- 78 percent of students receive some type of financial aid
- Availability of academic assistance for nontraditional students
- A wide variety of accredited academic programs in most colleges

SWOT ANALYSIS

THREATS

- Lack of pride and participation in athletic events
- Lack of Ph.D. programs
- Lack of research opportunities in a few programs with research needs
- Campus diversity
- Students in certain programs do not take advantage of internship opportunities
- Lack of cohesiveness and uniformity in decentralized communication strategy
- Multiple alternative taglines for colleges and specific programs
- A saturated market for graduate programs within MSU's area

BRANDING

Over the past several years, Missouri State University has gone through significant branding changes. The most recent one was the adoption of the "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place." tagline. Findings from the research study reveal the tagline has low awareness. However, survey respondents, including students who were admitted but not enrolled, had positive reactions to the tagline once aided. This feedback confirms the current tagline has the potential to succeed on campus and off campus.

Like many large higher education institutions, MSU has a decentralized communication system. This structure can be challenging for any communication outreach, but even more challenging when trying to successfully implement a rebranding strategy.

Many times, implementation challenges stem from lack of ownership in the brand, lack of opportunities to achieve individuality, lack of options flexible enough on design skills, and lack of resources. In order to overcome these challenges, MSU should consider implementing the following strategies:

- **Rejuvenate the Look of the Brand:** Consider forming an advisory committee to develop a new look for the overall brand, including the tagline. The committee would include representatives from the student body, staff, and faculty from the different colleges. Working as a team would help different constituencies obtain a sense of ownership and pride over the rejuvenated brand. If current staff members have the skills and experience in this type of rebranding effort, MSU could select a team of professionals that can work cohesively. This team should also have the capacity to provide a wide variety of options. New concepts would be presented to the committee for a preliminary evaluation. This exercise should include mock-ups that showcase how each option could be implemented through different executions. If the university doesn't have the resources to handle this task internally, a consulting marketing firm should be approached to handle this project. The design firm would work together with the advisory committee. The process to successfully rejuvenate the brand should include:
    - Gathering an advisory committee that represents different constituencies and academic departments.
    - Recruiting design professionals from the campus community or considering outsourcing design initiative to a marketing partner.
    - Developing a five-to-seven-question survey for representatives from each constituency to use to gather feedback from their respective groups. Questions would help assess what defines the brand within the community.
    - Develop a creative brief that merges research findings and preliminary qualitative research from internal groups.
    - Create a word farm with the results from the surveys. This tool could be used to generate inspiration for graphics and visual interpretations.

• Develop layout options that would be reviewed and revised by the committee. Layout options should highlight the versatility of each option and how it can be executed for different departments while achieving consistency and individuality.

• **Let Qualitative Research Guide the Final Decision:** The committee should narrow the new branding options to two or three. These options should then go through a series of focus group testing to benchmark opinions from different target audience groups. Results from the focus groups would help MSU choose a new look for the brand. More importantly, findings from the groups will provide insight that will improve the final product. The focus groups should represent the different constituencies, but the different audiences should be kept separate during the testing process. Making a decision based on research will strengthen the credibility of the brand and the final choice would be the community's choice.

MESSAGING

Strong brand standards define more than just the look of the brand. They also define the meaning and core of the brand. The campus community needs to understand the origin and core of the brand, and how it will take the university forward.

• **Share the Origin of the Brand:** During the discovery meetings, a few members of the faculty and staff knew the story behind the origin of "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place." tagline. However, the majority was unaware of this part of the university's history. As the research findings stated, current perception is that the university lacks traditions or awareness of existing traditions. Providing this background will add another layer of meaning to the tagline. Combining the tradition behind the brand, the community effort to develop a new visual execution, and the qualitative research findings will increase the adoption rate of the brand. Success rates will improve by creating a brand essence that's the result of an inclusive process, with research findings to support it.

• **Redefine "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place.":** The branding study reports clearly states the top attributes associated with MSU's brand: location, affordability, value, campus offerings, and facilities. All of these are assets that resonate with the target audience and should be part of the university's key messaging strategy. However, these tend to be the same attributes associated with community colleges. This is why MSU should avoid defining its brand based solely on the target audience's perspective. The university should incorporate messaging that includes the institution's competitive advantages. The core of MSU's communication efforts should be tied to unique academic opportunities. Currently, many of the messaging points focus on general facts about the university. Most of these executions are too broad. Uniqueness could

be defined by having programs not offered anywhere else in the region, highly ranked programs, and job placement rates, among others. The core strategy should highlight how MSU can help students follow their academic and professional passion, while being part of a community that helps them find their place as they enjoy a complete college experience. All messaging should lead with academic programs and follow with value and campus offerings talking points. An important element needed to successfully implement this communication strategy is a better tracking system in all colleges. More than likely there are key programs within each college that provide outstanding job placement rates or acceptance rates into prestigious graduate programs. These measurable success stories will provide credibility and positioning opportunities to the communication strategy.

- **Build the Brand Through the Success of Academic Programs:** One of the most damaging weaknesses from the research study is the misperception that MSU's graduates are limited to local or in-state opportunities. The foundation of the university's tagline should be the academic excellence achieved through each college. MSU's brand should be built around the far-reaching opportunities enjoyed by students and alumni. Currently, MSU utilizes the "Spotlights" program to highlight success stories from alumni, students, and faculty. These profiles are used in print, online, and in other outlets. Spotlights successfully communicate far-reaching opportunities after obtaining a degree from MSU. However, the execution of each highlight should include visual elements such as photography and short videos. The current text-heavy format might not be attractive for someone casually seeking more information about MSU. The key is to provide the information in a format that will turn a casual reader into an engaged reader.

Making "Spotlights" shorter and with more graphics is extremely important for the current student profiles. While the general public will relate to alumni success stories, it is sometimes challenging for high schools students to see themselves five to 10 years in the future. Alumni highlights that are more successful with high school students tend to showcase new graduates who have accomplished notable successes within a year or two after graduation. Ideally, recruitment efforts should focus on current student "Spotlights." In order to maximize the effectiveness of the profiles, students should experience the story in a multimedia format that is short and delivered in a current format. This messaging strategy should be directly correlated to unique programs with successful placement rates. At the same time, messaging should illustrate how students at MSU have access to affordable excellence, while enjoying the complete college experience. This can be achieved by highlighting programs where current students and new graduates have benefited from MSU's leadership in a given field. These students should also demonstrate a well-rounded experience that goes beyond the classroom's walls.

MSU should also consider this approach on mass media executions. Recruitment campaigns should highlight current student success stories in the format described above. Students highlighted should have experience that can be shared in 30-second radio spots, print ads, and

online ads. To extend the messaging, MSU could develop a website to expand each story. While the website would certainly serve as a recruitment tool, it would also be an ideal portal to reintroduce the general public to the academics-driven "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place" brand. The website would provide links toward any relevant content within the main site. The website would be an extension of mass communication efforts, and its main goal would be providing positioning opportunities for the university. The site would act as a portal where casual readers can be become engaged readers who would eventually be routed to missouristate.edu to learn more.

• **Taglines:** Upon reviewing existing publications, it's clear there are many alternate taglines. Many colleges have their own taglines, and programs within those colleges have taglines as well. Colleges spend a considerable amount of effort building awareness of these taglines. The abundant number of marketing statements exacerbates the lack of awareness of "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place." Many times, a college concentrates its efforts in building awareness of its tagline and leaves the institutional tagline out to avoid confusion. These issues will prevent the university's tagline from achieving its full potential. The communication strategy for this plan relies heavily on the outstanding programs available in each college. The strategy behind this plan will help colleges achieve notoriety through institutional marketing. The alternate taglines can still be part of promotional materials, but their roles should be minimized to "welcome headlines" or "sign off statements." These taglines should not be as prominent as the one attributed to the university. By following the recommendations in this plan, colleges will play a prominent role in the rejuvenation of the brand. Colleges would also receive prominent exposure in mass media efforts. In return, the university should experience increased participation from different colleges and programs in the implementation of an integrated communication strategy.

PROPAGATION

Once new visual and messaging strategies are finalized, the overall marketing strategy and tactics should be shared with the campus community.

• **Roll out the Final Product:** Since different constituencies will be included in the development process, it is important for them to see the final product. MSU should consider holding a campus-wide assembly where the refreshed brand and its different executions are introduced. The presentation could be delivered through a video, where the university shares the following points:
   • Goal of the advisory committee referenced in "Rejuvenate the Brand" tactics.

   • Introduce members of the advisory committee to showcase campus-wide representation.

- Discuss the different concepts tested during the focus group study, but avoid showing visuals for any concepts not selected.

- Present focus group study results. Consider showing video, playing audio, or sharing quotes from focus group participants. Typically, the most powerful statements come from student focus groups.

- Showcase final branding and how research findings impacted it.

- Demonstrate how the new brand will be used in tactical executions such as radio spots, print ads, brochure mock-ups, etc.

- Present the overall marketing strategy for the university including paid media, earned media, and social media.

- Discuss how the university will work with different departments/colleges to create unique layouts that fit within the new brand look.

- Outline what tools will be used to measure the effectiveness of the new branding strategy internally and externally.

By delivering the core of the presentation in a video format, MSU can then make this available to people not able to attend. The video should be no longer than 15 minutes.

- **How to Access the Brand for Day-to-Day Needs:** The adaption rate of the brand will depend on the ease of access to the brand elements. MSU should provide tools that allow the campus community to integrate the campaign into different materials. MSU currently offers a Marketing Toolkit to the campus community; however, utilization of the toolkit has remained low. While the university strongly suggests following toolkit guidelines, many departments continue to produce materials that do not follow the current brand. The following suggestions will increase acceptance and utilization of the toolkit:

  - Developing a new image for the brand with input and feedback from the campus community will create a stronger sense of ownership. This will improve acceptance and utilization of the new marketing toolkit.

  - Secure support from senior leadership on the implementation and propagation of the new image. MSU's president would issue a memo outlining the importance of new guidelines and the tools that will be available to help different departments achieve consistency.

  - Hold marketing workshops with relevant representatives from different departments. Attendance by staff and faculty members responsible for marketing and communications would be mandatory. The invitation to these workshops would come from the president. Several time-and-date options should be available. Key leaders and department heads could also be invited to the workshops on an informational capacity.

- New standard templates should provide more opportunities for individualization. In order to increase the adoption rate of a new design, the campus community will need more options to achieve individuality within the brand. If the only flexible options are changing a name or changing a color, then different departments would resist implementation because their materials would look just like everyone else's. Uniqueness can be achieved through different textures, shapes, inclusion of graphics that represent different academic disciplines, among others. A wider variety of template options for each execution will also improve participation rates.

- In addition to the templates, departments working with publication services could be part of the development process of the look and template for their respective departments. By doing this, there would be an opportunity for input and creativity within the brand parameters.

- Template options for people with basic design knowledge and no access to professional software should also be available.

- Provide a reasonable timeline to transition the institution and different departments to new look. Within the timeline, establish short-, intermediate-, and long-term objectives for the implementation process. Consider finalizing the process within a year.

- One-on-one meetings with staff members who develop communication materials might be needed in order to achieve progress.

- Consider adding a Brand Manager position to the university's communications team. Recommendations included in this plan go beyond the initial development of a new brand look. Most strategies include year-round personal communication, meetings, and programs with different departments. This multiple touch point approach would be helpful when branding solutions are needed, and during the supervision of the development of marketing materials. This position would act as a mediator who maintains the integrity of the brand, but at the same time focuses on delivering a satisfactory marketing product for different departments.

- **Grow the Brand Organically through the Campus:** Providing tools the campus community can use to propagate the "Follow Your Passion. Find Your Place." branding will be an asset. However, MSU's internal institutional communication efforts should lead the propagation of the new brand identity. The goal of this initiative is to extend the new brand into social media, thereby growing MSU's online following and reaching a large, well-targeted audience with important messaging. As discussed on the research findings, alumni and other target audiences would like additional communication efforts through online media channels. This strategy could be used to ensure brand messaging is woven into all digital media. The following social media executions could be branded with the tagline to continue to expose the target audiences to the rejuvenated brand.

  - Create a Propagation Plan to guide regular social posting in the initial months of the new marketing campaign and ensure that campaign messaging is woven into social messaging.

  - Continue social media presence and establish a goal of posting at least two stories per week via Facebook and Twitter link.

  - Include branding in short interview videos with students about their stories and experiences on a regular basis.

  - Continue sharing blog post links to Facebook and Twitter on a regular basis.

  - Ensure all future YouTube Channel postings like concert videos, media appearances, etc., are branded with the new look and messaging strategy. Continue using this material to share across other social platforms.

  - Establish "Story of the Month" contest to award followers who have shared their stories via the website or through video interviews and other submission methods. Giveaway T-shirts and paraphernalia.

  - Make more use of direct fan/follower engagement by asking questions and requesting shares and comments.

  - Add regular "Guess the Location" photo postings to both Facebook and Instagram feeds, highlighting close-up shots of various campus locations.

  - Launch a regular "Department Focus" feature via Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, this execution would involve stories from students in a particular department/discipline, short video interviews or scripted statements from department leaders, and images of activities within the department. For Instagram, the focus would be the images of activities within departments, classrooms, and the facilities themselves.

  - Host regular "Twitter chats" with leaders and faculty, promoting it as a chance for students and potential students to have questions answered and connect with leaders in their disciplines (using hashtags such as #AskMSU or #MSUChat

  - Explore more use of live webcasts of campus activities, events, and meetings that could be shared and promoted via social media, thereby showing a more "open" attitude to the public and students.

- Maintain promotion of social sharing on website pages, blog posts, and other online content.

- Launch and promote a contest pitting different departments, campus organizations and clubs, and so forth against each other to see who can gather the most student stories. Highlight the winner in social media and the stories that were gathered.

- In addition to electronic media executions, the university should also make traditional propagation strategy part of the rollout and brand maintenance process. Many of these executions are currently being used by MSU.

  - Include new look on campus banners, public space signage, posters, and flyers, among others.

  - Implement new look and messaging strategy on executions for different communication channels: video, Web, brochures, programs for public events, email signatures, and talking points used during presentations or speeches given by university officials.

An important component of any communication outreach is a paid media strategy. The following strategy takes into consideration past spending incurred by the university in paid advertising efforts. The plan assumes that past spending could be combined for a centralized paid media strategy in order to gain synergy and industry-approved levels of Gross Rating Points, reach (the percentage of members of the target audience exposed to the message) and frequency (the number of times that people reached by the campaign will see the ads). While centralized media placement is assumed for planning purposes, MSU should consider moving forward with a centralized media placement strategy. This approach ensures adequate representation in target markets and avoids duplicate efforts that result in wasteful use of marketing funds. Additionally, a centralized strategy could give MSU leverage to negotiate better rates.

UNDERGRADUATE RECRUITMENT

In regard to the freshman recruitment paid media plan, MSU should concentrate the support in the markets where the majority of freshmen have historically originated: southwestern Missouri and Saint Louis. The Joplin markets should also be included in addition to Springfield to extend reach throughout the southwest Missouri area.

The plan includes a mix of radio, online, mobile, and outdoor to reach the target audience as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Radio advertising in all three markets could begin in mid-October with the majority of support running in two-week flights through the month of March.
• Arbitron ratings data should be utilized to select stations that best reach the target audience in each market.
• Added-value or "bonus" radio schedules should be negotiated to run the two weeks following each paid flight, extending the media budget by approximately 58 percent.

Online and mobile ad elements targeting teens would run continuously from November through March.
• Mediamark media usage data shows that high school graduates 18-24 years of age are heavy users of mobile and online, especially Internet streaming radio.
• Pandora Internet radio is the most popular streaming music service among teens and young adults with 39 percent share of music listeners between the ages of 13 and 35.
• Pandora "everywhere" allows MSU to repurpose radio spots for online and mobile Pandora listeners. The university would also be able to pair the audio component with the visual of a banner ad on both platforms.
• Pandora allows the inclusion of the Kansas City market in the media coverage as well as the radio markets in Springfield, Joplin, and St. Louis.

The outdoor boards currently advertising MSU throughout the state of Missouri will remain up throughout the year reaching the entire in-state market and through-traffic with the MSU recruitment message.

If paid media funding levels remain at the same level, MSU should concentrate those funds into undergraduate recruitment advertising. This group can provide the largest number of potential new students, which would result in a higher return on investment. However, if additional funding is available, there are areas of growth that should be explored.

Television placement was discussed for MSU. Unfortunately, this media channel would be cost prohibitive under MSU's current media spending levels, especially within higher-priced markets such as St. Louis and Kansas City. Television can be great for the college recruitment and image-building processes. However, a strategy that relies on minimal spending on television would not be fruitful. Without the adequate GRPs, television placement would not have enough reach and frequency to generate an action or change perception. On the other hand, these minimal television funds could be better used on other less expensive media options.

ONLINE PROGRAMS

Higher education institutions are investing heavily in recruitments efforts for undergraduate and graduate online programs. Students enrolled in these programs are helping universities overcome decreased undergraduate enrollment caused by smaller high school graduating classes and steep competition from other universities. Increased enrollment in this area is also a profitable return on investment since the institution does not have facilities concerns such as classroom space, dorms, parking, etc.

Not surprisingly, the best fit to promote online programs is the Internet. There is a wide variety of strategic options that could be considered. Currently, MSU has utilized paid media options such as Google AdWords and placement on local websites and mobile apps. MSU should consider expanding the reach of these strategies by implementing the following recommendations:

- Utilize an ad network to place Google Search advertising. Ad networks offer competitive pricing and provide deeper analysis of the data. Ad networks take care of the media buy optimization based on search results and popular terms.

- Avoid doing spot placement on specific local websites or apps. Instead, change to geo-targeted placement on national websites and popular apps through ad networks.

- Utilize dynamic creative by switching to a media placement focused on online and mobile pre-roll video accompanied with banner ads.

- Consider placement on online radio outlets such as Pandora Audio Everywhere.

This plan prioritizes available funds for undergraduate recruitment paid media. However, if additional funds are available, below are some pricing strategies that MSU could consider.

• Option One: $10,000 to $20,000, search advertising during two key periods
• Option Two: $50,000, search advertising and a minimal online presence on websites in target markets
• Option Three: $100,000 search advertising and an adequate presence on websites in target markets

TRANSFER STUDENTS

The most efficient way to recruit transfer students remains to be articulation agreements. Targeting this audience with paid media can be challenging. Transfer students are typically bound by proximity to the university, and many of them transfer from a small number of feeder two-year colleges. These attributes make this target audience a great match for billboard advertising. The institution and MSU Outreach have used outdoor placement in the past. This plan takes into consideration contracts the university currently has in place. Moving forward, consider utilizing the outdoor budget to target transfer students. The boards could be placed in locations near key two-year colleges; however, messaging on the boards has to be more than just a tagline. Creative elements should specifically target transfer students. This campaign should be eye-catching but easy to understand in order to overcome readability issues with outdoor boards.

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Approximately 40 percent of students attending MSU come from large media markets, which can be cost prohibitive. The fact that these markets (Saint Louis and Kansas City) not being within close proximity of each other creates an additional challenge. However, these cities represent growth opportunities for the university and should be pursued.

In the past, the university has implemented paid media efforts in these markets. Upon closer review of those strategies, MSU is not spending the amount of dollars needed to create an impact. This type of spot placement in large markets could be considered an awareness effort rather than a results-driven effort. In order to produce results, new and creative methods should be discussed.

GUERRILLA MARKETING

Develop a guerrilla-marketing plan that has a two-fold approach. The first execution would showcase how MSU offers the complete college experience. The second execution of this campaign, and the most important one, should focus on MSU's affordable academic excellence offerings.

- **School Pride:** The purpose of this strategy is to create awareness of MSU's community. The creative should prominently highlight the bear branding or utilize Boomer the Bear. The campaign could include a campus/student life approach. It should creatively communicate how MSU offers the complete college experience in an affordable academic excellence setting. A few tactics popular in guerrilla marketing campaigns are posters, stealth product placement in public transportation, sidewalk takeovers, knit bombing, and unexpected outdoor displays.
- **Unique Academics:** While it's important to display the college experience MSU offers, this strategy cannot be implemented without a complementary strategy that highlights MSU's academics. MSU should avoid positioning strategies that compete with other in-state universities primarily known for athletics. MSU should be positioned as the university that offers unique, nationally recognized programs. The university could research the top five programs attracting students from St. Louis and Kansas City. Based on this data, MSU could come up with guerrilla marketing ideas that promote those programs and the different success stories.

BLOGGER OUTREACH PROGRAM

Larger metropolitan areas such as St. Louis and Kansas City offer the opportunity to work with prominent bloggers. Over the past few years, marketing directly to online and social media influencers is part of many marketing strategies. A group of influencers rapidly growing is women bloggers, sometimes referred to as "mommy bloggers." MSU should work with a marketing specialist to find three to five prominent bloggers with children who are currently juniors or seniors in high school. MSU's network of alumni in those markets could also help identify potential influencers. The university's communications office would then reach out to these influencers and offer them and their immediate families the opportunity to visit the campus. MSU's would handle travel

arrangements for this visit with the agreement that the influencer would document their experience. Of course, this experience is similar to working with a reporter. The agreement doesn't guarantee positive coverage. It is important that staff members from the communications and admissions departments be part of the influencer's experience. Ideally, this would take place during a Showcase event.

STUDENT BLOGGERS

MSU could recruit freshman students from the St. Louis and Kansas City markets as student bloggers. Many incoming freshmen will stay in touch with seniors at their high school, especially through social media. These blogs would serve as previews into the life of a freshman at MSU. The blog entries would be short and driven by visual elements such as photography, video, or animated such as GIFs. Ideally, this content would be captured with mobile devices such as cell phones and tablets. In order to provide the content in a channel relevant to the target audience, MSU could utilize a microblogging tool such as a Tumblr page for this effort. Student bloggers would use this microblogging site to document topics assigned by the university. The topics could vary. One option could be to highlight programs of study attractive to students from these markets. More casual posts could include student life, homecoming, and the city of Springfield as a college town. The students would then promote their blogs through their Twitter feeds and Facebook pages. MSU would need to develop an approval process for the review and publishing of the student-generated content.

While MSU currently works with student bloggers, this recommendation suggests switching the communication tool which is a more current and social media friendly outlet. It is important to use an existing tool that is relevant to the target audience at the time of implementation. Additionally, blog entries should focus on visuals and multimedia elements instead of long written entries.

The university should recruit four to six students and encourage a weekly blog post per student, with topics being assigned by the university based on relevant recruiting data in the target areas. Approximately 40 percent of students attending MSU come from large media markets, which can be cost prohibitive. The fact that these markets (Saint Louis and Kansas City) not being within close proximity of each other creates an additional challenge. However, these cities represent growth opportunities for the university and should be pursued.

In the past, the university has implemented paid media efforts in these markets. Upon closer review of those strategies, MSU is not spending the amount of dollars needed to create an impact. This type of spot placement in large markets could be considered an awareness effort rather than a results-driven effort. In order to produce results, new and creative methods should be discussed.

MSU currently maintains a regular tour schedule during the fall and winter semesters. It also holds two large-scale recruiting events called Showcase.

SHOWCASE

As previously stated in this plan, many have identified the lack of traditions and school spirit as one of the key weaknesses for the institution. In order to change this perception, MSU should give prospective students the chance to experience a vibrant college environment during their visit. Events such as Showcase provide an opportunity to share the university's assets in a way that creates energy and excitement about joining MSU's community. The university should consider expanding the number of Showcase events. Similar public universities in the region, the same size and with smaller student bodies, hold events like Showcase. Most of these institutions are hosting five to seven of these events a year, and they successfully attract anywhere between 300 and 600 students per event.

Showcase successfully connects faculty and staff with prospective students and their families. These events can also offer the opportunity to experience student life at MSU and its traditions. This experience could include a preview of MSU's status as a Division I school, student life, organizations, and social life. The impact of this experience would be compounded by the opportunity of sharing with peers who also want to join this community. This strategy could increase the number of students who visit the campus. It would also increase the number of students who have a new perception of MSU's academic quality and vibrant campus life.

Increasing the number of Showcase events would present some logistical and budget challenges. The final goal is to significantly increase the number of events. However, during the first year, MSU could consider increasing the number of events from two to four. The first year could be used to assess the success in attendance and satisfaction with the experience. This plan would also require additional time and effort from faculty, staff, and current students since they would need to participate in these events. To help with this scenario, one or both of the additional events could take place on a Friday. Many times, Friday events experience higher attendance numbers, but that number doesn't necessarily translate into a higher number of applications. Many students attend the events as a senior class project. Students willing to attend on a Saturday typically have a higher level of interest in the institution. That being said, a satisfactory experience at a Showcase event could motivate a student to add MSU to the list of universities they are considering.

CAMPUS TOURS

MSU currently works with student ambassadors who provide outstanding campus tours. The way the prospective students experience the community sometimes depends on the amount of activity taking place on the day of the tour. The university should consider adding interactive elements to the tour. This will help prospective students enjoy the same quality experience regardless of the day and time of the tour.

- **Augmented Reality:** MSU could add an augmented reality component to the campus tours. This tactic would rely on short videos hosted on a tour-specific mobile-enhanced website. Access to the site could be available through the university's mobile app. The videos would showcase specific locations. For example, if the football stadium is empty during a tour visit, the tour guide could use a tablet device to play a 15-to-30-second video showing what game day feels like. The website could also show a video that exemplifies what the library looks like at night during finals week, or key programs that provide compelling visuals. There could be some logistical issues with playing videos outdoors due to glare from the sun. The tour guide would not have to showcase every video. The videos shown could depend on the specific interest of the tour members. The tour guide could motivate the prospective student to use the microsite to keep exploring the campus on their ride home.

- **Social Media:** The university could explore adding a social media component to the tour. The tours would have an MSU-generated hashtag. The hashtag could be printed on the back of the T-shirt worn by the tour guide. The tour guide would motivate students to use their phones, capture their experience, and share it with a hashtag on Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook. This strategy would create a virtual journal of hundreds of students touring the university and capturing different aspects of campus life. The student ambassador could start off the photo posting by taking a photo of the group and sharing it on a recruitment-specific Instagram account. If possible, the tour guide could tag the attendees. Friends of prospective students would then be exposed to free and organic MSU advertising delivered directly to their social media feeds.

- **Integrated Talking Points:** Student ambassadors who serve as tour guides are representatives of the university's brand. It's important that talking points used during the tour reflect the same messaging points that individual colleges want to convey. This marketing plan has established the need for a strategy that elevates the university's academic reputation through notable programs for each college. It is important that tour guides highlight the same competitive advantages colleges want to highlight. During the discovery process, representatives from different colleges put together pride points for the different academic disciplines. These points should be put together as a "Quick Facts" booklet that can be used by admissions, publications, individual colleges, and communications staff. This Quick Facts booklet should also include a short list of pride points for the university.
MSU currently maintains a regular tour schedule during the fall and winter semesters. It also holds two large-scale recruiting events called Showcase.

MSU has a Publications Department that produces many of the university's major recruitment pieces such as the undergraduate Viewbook and travel Viewbook. Other departments also work with Publications to develop promotional pieces for specific programs or colleges. Frequently, departments request designs that are not consistent with the university's brand. Finally, there are departments that develop their own materials.

While this process has generated beautifully designed pieces, some of them are not cohesive. Possible solutions to solve these issues can be found on the "Branding" section of this marketing plan. Consequently, Publications will need the support from MSU's senior leadership in the implementation of a cohesive brand look. This look would include elements that foster uniqueness in each piece. Departments, programs, and colleges with in-house design capabilities should follow the same standards. The following recommendations include ideas to integrate and improve university-produced creative elements:

- **Communications Committee:** Assemble a group of staff members that works on different levels of the communication process (writing, design, video) and hold bimonthly meetings. During these short meetings, staff members would discuss the different projects on which they are working. Senior staff committee members could then advise on how to best represent the university and its brand. This approach does not eliminate the decentralized communication freedom that different departments currently enjoy, but it offers a venue to share and assess how the brand is being used.

- **Change to a Large-Imagery-Less-Copy Format:** Many of the current publications include great visuals, but these visuals typically take a second place to the amount of copy included on a page. New publications should use high-quality photography as the main tool to tell the story of each page. The copy should play a supportive role to the image. In order to do this, the amount of copy included should be reduced significantly.

- **Concentrate on the Providing the Right Visuals:** An image is worth a thousand words. The branding study states that MSU's different target audiences have concerns about the lack of traditions and the reach of the academic programs available. It's easy to provide a narrative that counters this perception, but prospective students need to see innovation taking place inside and outside the classroom. They also need to see the maroon and white pride that defines the culture at MSU. Perceptions are not changed by words only; graphics should play a key role in addressing weaknesses discovered by the branding study. These types of imagery should be displayed prominently on most recruitment pieces. Image selection will depend on what particular programs have to offer. For example, the School of Agriculture discussed implementing genetic mapping procedures in some of their programs. If the visuals of the process, or the facility in which the mapping takes place, are relevant, this could be used an opportunity to showcase innovation and a leading academic environment at Missouri State University.
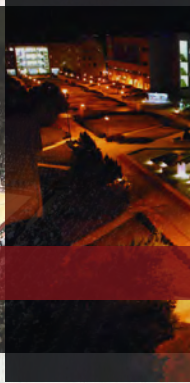
- **Build the Academic Reputation through the Colleges:** Just like the rest of the branding strategy, publications should start highlighting specific programs of study. Ideally, the Viewbook would include spreads for every college. Prospective students sometimes don't understand the academic college division system. Grouping the information in this way would showcase the institution's excellence in the different disciplines available. Also, this is the best venue to briefly highlight unique and results-driven programs. This could also be achieved through short testimonial stories. Longer versions of these success stories could live on a blog or as a video. These elements could be part of the admissions website, or the individual academic websites.

- **Provide Facts, Statistics and Points of Reference:** Emotion, visuals, and compelling narratives should be an important component of a communication piece. But it is important that these communication strategies are all built around factual and measurable information. This data will position key programs of study as leaders in the regional and national playing field. It is important that this information be gathered and provided by each college. Doing so will ensure recruiters and tour guides are working as a cohesive team with the different academic disciplines. Additionally, it will be increasingly important that all colleges improve collection of measurable data that can be use as supporting facts for any pride points.

- **Websites:** Different colleges and departments also have individual websites. As part of this branding strategy, websites for colleges and academic programs should be revised to follow the new look of the brand. However, each department should also have the freedom to include design elements that help them achieve a look that follows the brand but is still unique to their discipline. This strategy should closely follow the approach recommended for other elements such as mass communication materials and publications. It is also important to develop a mobile-responsive website that adapts to screen sizes of devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. The mobile design should also follow the new approved look for the brand.

Any effective marketing plan should establish success outcomes and a timeline to achieve those. The following section provides short-, intermediate-, and long-term success measurements that MSU can use to track progress.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES: SIX MONTHS TO A YEAR
- Assemble marketing advisory committee
- Rejuvenate and redefine current brand identity
- Conduct qualitative research study to benchmark new brand assets
- Conduct campus-wide presentation sharing university's promotional strategy

INTERMEDIATE TERM OUTCOMES: ONE TO TWO YEARS
- Develop brand guide and templates
- Increase adoption rate of brand identity
- Assemble communications committee
- Start implementation of brand propagation strategy
- Start new paid-media strategy
- Implementation of guerrilla marketing ideas
- Recruit students and start student blogger program
- Implement recommendations for recruitment events and publications

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES: TWO YEARS PLUS
- Increase new student enrollment in accordance with the university's enrollment management plan
- Conduct new research study to benchmark changes in brand awareness and perception
- Increase market share in key markets
- Increase level of engagement with alumni and donors
- Measure change in brand awareness of Missouri State University