How epic is your education brand strategy?

Category: Branding
written by Stewart Hodgson | 6 January 2017
When it comes to education brand strategy, is your university or college a megastar? Is it in the spotlight for the right reasons? Is your tone of voice confident and assuring? Do you come across as human and approachable? Are you being true to yourself and authentic? If you can answer yes to all of these questions, you're well on the way to being famous in your own universe. But, if there's room for improvement, it's worth remembering that it is more important now than ever to nail your education brand strategy, and filter this down to even the smallest piece of communication in your marketing portfolio. Including, and especially, your website and student recruitment campaigns. Consistency across the mix is key to achieving an eduction branding strategy that puts your place of study in the spotlight.

But, in the honest world of education branding there is no place to hide behind marketing spin. So, be confident, and reveal just a bit of your heart and soul. This way you might rival just a little of the success of the mega-brands.

Are education brands different from consumer brands?

Apple. Nike. Sony. Think of a brand and names like these giants might just spring to mind. Our clients in the education sector often start by listing consumer brands when they describe what they want to achieve. Then it's our role to unearth the unique characteristics of an education provider and present it in an appealing and imaginative way. As an education branding agency with years of experience it's a

challenge we relish, and the results speak volumes.

But, comparing education sector branding and consumer brands can be misleading. Of course there are similarities. But there's a big difference. Consumer branding is often about creating a myth to differentiate more or less identical products. One shampoo or soft drink is much like another. Differentiation depends on packaging, spin and a bit of gloss.

Indeed some educational clients find this superficiality so off-putting they avoid thinking about their institute as a brand at all. In one respect they're right. Smoke and mirrors don't work in the education sector. Education branding is about identifying real differences in your institute and bringing them to the surface. One university or college is profoundly different from another, as anyone who has made the round of open days will tell you. Education brands are often built on relationships, which depend on those who respond best to what is tangibly true.

Education providers sometimes question whether branding is worth the investment at all, because few can name strong brands in the education arena. But should they? Education brands don't need to be known in every household. Just by those who need to know them. And sometimes that's the local community, where reputation is just as important as image. It might be a captive audience, but should never be taken granted.

Branding in education doesn't promise the immediate paybacks of consumer branding campaigns. Because it concerns truth, it is a slower burn. It's about gradually shifting and shaping audience perceptions, both internal and external, to build a strong reputation and loyalty.

Less immediate – but also less dependent on last week's campaign design. This doesn't mean education branding isn't accountable, but it does mean you should use qualitative

rather than quantitative measures. A thought to turn the Finance Director's heart cold, but imagine a world where you only did things you could emphatically prove in pounds, shillings and pence.

As a provider of higher and further education you have a brand whether you choose to manage it or not. Build your future on your true strengths. Stick at it. And you'll become famous – and successful – in your own universe.

Fabrik is an education sector branding specialist based in the UK, that also works in the corporate and commercial world.

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