



How To Be Popular—As A School

(NAPSA)—While most students hope to be popular while at college, for many colleges, the quest for popularity can take an intriguing turn.

These days, universities often struggle to draw prospective students and alumni donations in an extremely competitive environment. Some, however, have discovered a solution. Consider the case of historically black college Jackson State University (JSU). It needed a strategic marketing plan, help combining more than 100 websites into one, and an honest evaluation of the brand platform.

To achieve all that, JSU had to engage students, faculty, alumni, and community and business leaders. The process included a comprehensive survey that compared the perception of these groups to reality, an analysis of its marketing and communications strengths and weaknesses, advertising and social media. There was also the launch of the new logo during halftime of a JSU home football game while the school's legendary band, the Sonic Boom of the South, generated excitement.

The result: record student enrollment and alumni giving.

The experts behind this turnaround, vitalink, a branding and marketing firm, and AndiSites, a web design company, work as part of the HBCUgrow team to create results-oriented programs for colleges and universities, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). They offer these suggestions:

1. Define what your university or other organization wants to accomplish. Make a list of specific goals and objectives and measure success.

2. Do the research. Have an unbiased party look at existing research, conduct market and competitive research, survey stakeholders (mini-focus groups and Perception vs. Reality survey) and do an objective brand audit.



Record student enrollment and alumni giving can be achieved at colleges that follow a smart plan.

Use a third party to encourage honest responses.

3. Engage your stakeholders from day one. They'll give you a 360-degree view of reality—not just how you see your brand. If your website is not working, you can be certain they'll let you know. A collaborative approach also gains the buy-in you will need to roll out a new or updated brand.

4. Create a flexible strategic plan with measurable results, update as you learn and move forward. Don't let it sit on a shelf.

5. Get your creative and brand right. It's not just the logo or pretty graphics. Your brand platform's messages, voice and tone all need to represent your school accurately for better results. Again, input from an unbiased party helps ensure you're on track.

6. Communicate from beginning to end, using the methods your stakeholders prefer. Personalized, multitouch, multichannel automated campaigns make this easier and free up your staff to focus on high-value tasks. Bonus: Results are trackable.

7. Follow through with your brand promises. If you don't live up to your brand, people turn away and you don't get a second chance.

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