Harnessing the Power of Gold

Christopher Hunt
Western Michigan University, christopher.hunt@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/acad_leadership

Part of the Advertising and Promotion Management Commons, and the Educational Leadership Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/acad_leadership/81

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Faculty Development at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Leadership Academy by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
Harnessing the Power of Gold
Chris Hunt, Director of Marketing Communications
2017-18 Academic Leadership Academy

Problem
Consistent branding at WMU has been the topic of many on-campus discussions in 2017. The Strategic Management Executive Council (SMEC) identified brand and communication consistency and continuity as a risk priority. As part of that risk assessment, a Collaborative Risk/Opportunity Management (CRÖM) team has been assigned to evaluate the following issues:
- Many units are still not aligning with established brand messages and design guidelines, diffusing marketing efforts.
- Lacking clear voice for the University.
- Internal communication occurs in silos, so people do not get the full picture; especially a problem with part-time staff and faculty, impacting overall staff morale.
- Under-empowered University Relations team.

In addition, the team charged with creating the Integrated Marketing and Communications Plan for WMU has identified this as a problem area that needs to be addressed before implementing the plan.

There are four different logos being used to represent the University currently. This doesn’t include the logos of the Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine or WMU Cooley Law School.

Current State
The following are the current logos being used to represent Western Michigan University:

Consistent Branding
Branding and marketing in higher education have become increasingly important over the past two decades and institutions are dedicating more attention to marketing functions than in previous years. A key element in strong branding is focus and simplicity. A brand’s logo is a symbolic representation of the brand and provides a visual mark for the consumer to form brand associations. A brand’s logo is extremely important in establishing an initial connection between the consumer and the brand and provides a “tangible asset” for the brand in the mind of the consumer (Watt & Genzer, 2013). When a brand is consistent, it demonstrates that it is thoughtful, authentic and buttoned-up. It suggests professionalism and organization. An inconsistent brand, however, can shatter credibility and create confusion. This confusion results in a complicated experience and can ultimately produce a negative association with the brand. When a brand creates confusion through inconsistency it can lead to cognitive strain on the user. This strain will decrease the user’s comprehension and affect for that brand. The easier the experience, the easier it is to connect with someone on an emotional level. Streamlining a brand can also create efficiencies on campus through established guidelines and shared resources (Buck, 2017).

Branding will not succeed if an organization is resistant to being consistent (Amuta, 2016). Western Michigan University currently uses five vastly different logos in highly visible, public places, diluting the brand. The official mark of WMU is the block W. Evidence of the block W being used as the mark of the University dates back to the institution’s beginning. The W is available in a variety of approved options (gold, black, white and brown) to accommodate a wide range of design needs. The WMU seal is reserved for formal occasions and recruitment efforts in international markets. A University color palette, with primary colors of brown and gold, and typography are managed by the Office of University Relations.

WMU Intercollegiate Athletics has a separate identity, with a different, beveled brown W logo overlaid with a Bronco head; it also utilizes its own distinct typography and color palette, with primary colors of black and tan. As a licensed mark, this identity is used on most WMU apparel and merchandise. For football, a “ghost Bronco” was developed and can be seen on building signage, uniforms, apparel and merchandise. Development and Alumni Relations utilizes yet another logo and color palette. A brown W with a tan outline and Bronco head can be seen on most materials produced by this department.

Recommendation
To create a consistent, strong visual brand for WMU, the Office of University Relations and members of the Strategic Marketing Communication Plan Committee recommend using two marks:
- The W (preferably gold whenever possible) to represent academics.
- A brown and gold Bronco head to represent athletics.

Additionally, the Office of University Relations and members of the committee recommend that the athletic department discontinue use of black and tan as primary colors and incorporate the official brown and gold into their palette, uniforms and promotions. Brown and gold are unique and stand out. Black and tan are used by Purdue and Oakland University. They also recommended that Development and Alumni Relations use the gold W for most communications and the Bronco head only when events are athletic-related.

Conclusion
The momentum at Western Michigan University is undeniable. It is imperative that the University moves forward with a consistent brand in order to be successful in this time of growth and visibility. The recommendation to continue with a simplified visual identity is supported by research and is seen as an industry standard among our competitors. Streamlining the WMU visual identity will help eliminate confusion, improve brand perception and create efficiencies across campus.

Contact Information
Chris Hunt
Director of Marketing Communications – Office of University Relations
1903 W. Michigan Avenue
T: (269) 387-8417
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5433
E: christopher.hunt@wmich.edu