

# The Direct Results of Integrated Marketing

*Integrated marketing communications plans balance an institution's responsibility to create awareness (brand marketing) with its need to generate results (direct marketing).*



**WHEN TALK TURNS TO IMPROVING MARKETING EFFORTS**, college and university administrators sooner or later ask themselves whether the marketing function should be centralized or decentralized. Because the answer so often involves organizational structure, budgets, staffing, and politics, trustees and senior administrators need a clear grasp of the issues.

One catalyst that has pushed the question of centralized versus decentralized to the forefront is the increased marketing sophistication of many boards. Many now count among their members senior marketing executives of major corporations and organizations. These trustees are pushing, and sometimes pushing hard, for their colleges and universities to apply the same marketing tools and principles that professors teach in Business 101 classes. The challenges these trustees have faced in trying to improve effectiveness and create efficiencies in their workplaces are framing an important question in their trusteeships: How can we be sure our institution is receiving a maximum return on each marketing dollar it spends?

**Check the Motivations.** As board members consider the centralized versus decentralized issue, it is important to understand what motivates senior administrators. On some campuses, the staff has a strong and genuine desire to improve the effectiveness of integrated marketing efforts. Perhaps they are frustrated by current efforts and wonder whether dollars are being well-spent as the institution attempts to build a stronger brand, recruit more students, or raise more dollars.

On other campuses, however, the motivation may be less altruistic. This is the sometimes-difficult issue that boards must tease out. Rather than effective-

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## DO YOU HAVE A MARKETING INTEGRATION PROBLEM?

Here are some questions board members might pose about integrated marketing:

1. Does the marketing committee understand the relationship between brand marketing and direct marketing?
2. Does the marketing committee include representatives from both the brand-marketing and direct-marketing “sides” of the house?
3. Is there a single plan that directs both brand-marketing and direct-marketing efforts?
4. Can staff involved in the direct-marketing effort—especially student recruiting—guide the direction of the brand-marketing effort?
5. Are data available that show how brand-marketing initiatives have supported direct-marketing initiatives?

If the answer to more than one of these questions is No, you likely have an integration problem.

ness (or perhaps in addition to effectiveness), the deans and vice presidents may be motivated largely by issues of turf. They may see the centralization question revolving around such issues as control and size of staffs and budgets.

For example, administrators responsible for student recruitment or fund-raising may fear a centralized approach to marketing, believing that while they will be held accountable for recruiting the class or raising the money, they no longer will have direct control over the resources—the time, talent, and treasure—needed to do the job. Such administrators are afraid their budgets will be usurped, their people absorbed, their organizational structures upended, and their needs dropped to the end of the queue.

Some Important Definitions. Before we delve deeper into the issues of centralized versus decentralized marketing, it's important to understand what we mean by integrated marketing communications (IMC). The term refers to a comprehensive, coordinated, institutionwide effort to communicate mission-critical messages in ways that target audiences notice, understand, and respond to. In other words, integrated marketing communications is all about

developing and communicating relevant messages that get noticed.

If you strip away the terminology, you discover that IMC has two broad functions: *brand marketing* and *direct marketing*.

Brand marketing has a simple goal—to create awareness in the minds of your most important target audiences. Brand marketing is concerned with building your image and increasing name recognition among prospective students, donors, and other important audiences.

Rather than creating awareness, direct marketing has a different goal—to generate response. Most colleges and universities, no matter how large or small, focus their direct-marketing efforts on two activities: recruiting and fund-raising. Their goal is to entice students to apply and enroll, and donors to consider and contribute. Direct-marketing efforts are always more effective when preceded by effective brand marketing. It's really pretty simple: More students will enroll if the right students are aware of your institution prior to your student search.

Here's a vivid example of the relationship between brand marketing and direct marketing.

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Brand marketing is Ford telling people that “Quality is Job 1.” Direct marketing is Ford asking you whether you want to buy a Taurus. Ford will sell more cars if its direct-marketing appeal, “Want to buy a Taurus?” has been preceded by a targeted, robust brand-building campaign: “Quality is Job 1.” In the same manner, your institution will recruit more students and raise more dollars if your recruiting and fund-raising strategies are preceded by effective brand building that is based on solid research.

An Integrated Plan. With this model of integrated marketing communications as a guide, it should become apparent that the question may be less whether your college or university’s approach to marketing is centralized or decentralized and more whether its efforts are truly integrated. Are direct-marketing strategies truly supported by effective brand building? In other words, are these parallel functions working in tandem?

On most campuses, the institution’s brand-building efforts should be centralized because senior leaders assume the task of building the larger institutional image. At the same time, direct-marketing strategies typically are more effective when they are decentralized. This decentralization is necessary because the vice president of undergraduate admissions, the law school dean, and the vice president for advancement have different direct-marketing needs and calendars, and these individuals are very much in tune with their markets.

The key to balancing your institution’s centralized and decentralized marketing efforts is this: While brand marketing and direct marketing have different goals and are directed by different individuals, everything must be coordinated by one comprehensive plan. This plan (and people’s adherence to it) creates symphony from cacophony and integration from disintegration. It is the plan that balances an institution’s brand-marketing responsibilities with its direct-marketing needs.

**A Single Leader.** Board members need a set of conceptual tools so they can better monitor the marketing functions at their institutions. For example, just as a football team needs a quarterback or an orchestra a conductor, every complex effort needs a single leader. In a similar fashion, a college or university’s

integrated marketing communications efforts must be led by a single, qualified individual who understands the role and function of IMC in a higher education setting.

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This leader—we can call this person the marketing champion—has two goals. First, this leader must be committed to building the institution’s brand. And second, this leader must actively support the institution’s direct-marketing functions.

Our marketing champion’s responsibilities include the following:

- interfacing with the board’s marketing committee (if one exists);
- managing expectations among senior administrators;
- dovetailing the institution’s brand-marketing and direct-marketing needs;
- differentiating between brand-marketing and direct-marketing goals and activities;
- stressing the integration of marketing functions across multiple media, venues, and departments;
- ensuring that an adequate, sustainable budget is available; and
- assessing the overall effectiveness of the institution’s marketing efforts.

Perhaps most important, the job of the marketing champion is to assemble, mentor, and lead the team. Kate Spencer, director of university marketing for American University in Washington, D.C., notes that when her board decided to adopt integrated marketing communications, a cross-functional team of key people met each month to reinforce the university’s brand position and share information that could support integrated marketing initiatives. The

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team leader was the vice president of enrollment services. Having a leader that high up on the ladder, she says, assured the campus community that the president, provost, and board of trustees were fully behind the plan and that cooperation and results were expected.

Board members often draw upon a rich understanding of what it takes to be the marketing leader in an organization. Their insights must be part of the conversation.

**B**oard members should avoid tactical discussions of how to accomplish the goals. They must stay at altitude and focus on the big questions.

**Assembling the Team.** No matter how talented, a quarterback is useless unless he is surrounded by a team. Eric Forseth, vice president for enrollment services and marketing at Northwest Nazarene University in Idaho, says the team is responsible for providing direct oversight of the institution's brand-marketing strategy and for coordinating its efforts with such direct-marketing functions as recruiting and fund-raising.

The job of the team, then, is to write and execute the integrated marketing communications plan. In most instances, this involves the following:

- defining target audiences and geography;
- developing the brand-marketing and direct-marketing goals;
- writing, executing, and evaluating the effectiveness of action plans to accomplish the goals; and
- developing strategies for rewarding individuals and departments that actively support the plan.

It is essential that the team include decision makers and tacticians from both the brand-marketing (centralized) and direct-marketing (decentralized) areas of the institution.

For IMC efforts to be fruitful, they must be directed by a *team*, not a *committee*. By definition, teams work toward a common purpose and understand how each "position" supports and enhances the whole. Too often, college and university marketing efforts are directed by committees with divergent goals, methods, and attitudes. These committees often look good on paper, but too often they are incapable of acting in a timely, cogent, and coordinated manner.

Paula Compton, associate vice president of enrollment services at the University of Toledo, suggests integrated marketing represents a cultural change. Parties at both the centralized and decentralized levels need to see how the institution as a whole will benefit and how individual units will gain. Cultural change takes time, she says, and can be successful only when people work together with an attitude of mutual respect and trust.

**Board Responsibilities.** In some cases, it makes sense to have a trustee or two (or three) serve on the marketing team or be a sounding board for the team. The team's access to board talent—and even resources—will give the team more legitimacy not only in the eyes of the rest of the board but to other campus stakeholders as well. Of course, this board involvement must be carefully choreographed. Board members must stay at altitude and focus on the big questions:

- What are our goals?
- How will achieving these goals benefit the institution?
- What resources will we need to reach these goals?
- How can we measure progress?

Board members should avoid tactical discussions of how to accomplish the goals, except in the most general sense. An offhand comment by a board member that the college should "do more billboards" may cause a marketing team to redirect time and energy, as their goal becomes pleasing the board member rather than executing sound strategy.

As colleges and universities grapple with issues of centralization and decentralization, or integration and disintegration, the board has clear responsibilities.

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First, it must elevate the conversation above turf and power and ensure that institutional brand-marketing and direct-marketing needs are addressed.

Second, the board must insist on a solid, workable, integrated plan that addresses the institution's brand-marketing and direct-marketing needs. If senior administrators are unwilling or unable to create a plan that coordinates all strategies and tactics, then the board should hold up a very bright red flag.

Third, the board must be confident the plan is funded at a realistic and sustainable level. Sufficient and renewable dollars must be allocated both to the brand-marketing and direct-marketing efforts. A trustee with a finely honed sense of the actual costs of building an image will play a valuable role here.

Fourth, the board must insist that the plan contain benchmarks so that progress can be measured. Corporate directors are very comfortable with meas-

urement; in fact, more often than not, their own boards insist on it. This same diligence must apply here.

Finally, the board must hold people accountable for executing and adhering to the plan. If a board approves a more market-savvy organization, adopts an ambitious plan, and allocates significant resources, then it should hold accountable the people responsible for the plan's execution. Accountability will send a powerful and highly motivating message throughout the campus. ♦

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