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The Art of Marketing

Using Art Installations to Enhance Brand Image

***Summary.** Changing attitudes about a brand's image is one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish in marketing. This paper will describe how Franklin University overcame that challenge with Dr. Doug Ross' Faces of Franklin campaign. The campaign utilized a unique approach to achieve its objectives with art installations as the main communication medium. The results clearly illustrate the success of the campaign and the newly enhanced brand image of Franklin University.*

***Keywords:** Branding, alternative marketing strategy, marketing and art, attitude shift, brand attitude, branding higher education*

1. Introduction

Franklin University was faced with a challenge: how do you change the student image of your university? In recent years, Franklin had been experiencing continual growth, specifically in the online segment. In addition, to its main location in downtown Columbus, Franklin had also opened up several new locations in the surrounding area. However, despite this growth, the appearance to the face-to-face student base was that the university enrollment was just stable. Due to the nature of the growth, it was not visibly seen or acknowledged.

In addition to this, the students perceived Franklin to be a small, local university, when in fact students attended Franklin either on campus or online from

all over the world. Franklin was a thriving, international university. Therefore, Dr. Doug Ross was tasked with finding the solution to Franklin's situation, and given the following project objectives:

- 1) Change students' perception of enrollment from stable to growth.
- 2) Change students' perception of market description from local/regional to international.

The efforts to change these perceptions tie directly to students' perceptions of Franklin University as a brand. Enrollment and the market description are indicators of whether or not the University is a thriving, healthy institution. These factors and issues such as operating in a sizable business environment make an impact in distinguishing the Franklin brand from competitors. As most marketing professionals agree, "brands are a company's most valuable assets" and "today, more than ever before, the perception of a quality difference is essential for survival in the marketplace."¹

Changing attitudes about a brand's image is one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish in marketing, especially of something as intangible as education and the branding of an educational institution. In order to change these student perceptions, the solution would not only have to be a solid strategy but something extremely unique and innovative.

2. Strategy

In order to accomplish the project objectives Dr. Ross set forth with a creative plan: to make students *experience* the reality of the situation. They would experience Franklin's enrollment numbers and they would experience Franklin's international reach. This strategy was especially chosen to overcome the intangibility of an educational environment. "Great brands use creativity to make emotional connections with consumers. Brands make emotional connections when they engage consumers through complex sensory experiences and deep emotional episodes."²

Clow & Baack, experts in marketing communications, describe how affective message strategies "invoke feelings and emotions and match them with the product, service, or company."³ The affective message strategy was used to change

¹ W.R. Lane, K.W. King, T. Reichert, *Kleppner's advertising procedure* (18th ed.), Upper Saddle River, Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey 2011.

² T.C. O'Guinn, C.T. Allen, R.J. Semenik, *Promo2*. Mason, South-Western Cengage Learning, OH 2013.

³ K.E. Clow, D. Baack, *Integrated advertising, promotion, & marketing communication*, Upper Saddle River, Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey 2001.

the feeling of the student about the university. The rationale was that a student would feel better about attending a growing, international university than they would a small, regional school. The strategy tries to “enhance the likeability of the product, recall of the appeal, or comprehension of the advertisement.”⁴ Affective strategies elicit emotions that, in turn, affect the student’s reasoning process and lead to an action, in this case, a change of perception.

In addition to the affective message strategies, the solution needed to invoke word of mouth. Word of mouth is the most credible source of marketing message. As Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik explain, “word of mouth is the primary factor behind 20 to 50 percent of all purchasing decisions.”⁵ They go on to explain that “its influence is greatest when consumers are buying a product for the first time or when the product is relatively expensive, which tends to make people conduct more research, seek more opinions, and consider their options longer than they otherwise would.”⁶ This assertion ties in directly to higher education marketing in that many consumers are choosing an institution for the first time and education is an expensive investment. Word of mouth is key to higher education marketing.

Therefore, the idea was not just to educate the students on the true image of Franklin, but to prompt the sharing of that true image. If the students experience the image, they are more likely to talk about it. It gave them a discussion about Franklin the next day at work. They were involved and the image of their university was escalated. So they could feel proud and would want to talk about the brand.

Therefore, in order to accomplish the task at hand, the Faces of Franklin campaign was created – a marketing art installation to change the perceptions of Franklin University’s brand image. The art installations were a unique approach, which was necessary because “if you want your message heard, you’ll need a way to stand out from the crowd, and that will require creativity.”⁷ There were three distinct installations to the Faces of Franklin campaign: 1) Banners, 2) Graphs, and 3) Stand-ups. The art installation solved the challenge of how to represent numbers and create an experience; it can be done through pictures and visual representations.

Although each art installation was distinct, there were several similar key factors maintained. For instance, at the entrance of the building where students attend classes, inside the lobby doors, was the main installation. This would be

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ J. Bughin, J. Doogan, O. Vetvik, *A new way to measure word-of-mouth marketing*, “McKinsey Quarterly” 2010, No. 2, p. 113-116. Retrieved from: <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.olinkserver.franklin.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=49470282&site=ehost-live>.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ T.C. O’Guinn, C.T. Allen, R.J. Semenik, op. cit.

a ten foot wide by eight foot tall exhibit. After the main piece were auxiliary pieces students had to navigate through that reinforced the main piece.

The art pieces were only in the lobby for one week, at the beginning each trimester. The campaign lasted one academic year, so the installations were only up for three weeks in total. The selected weeks of the installation were also strategic in that it was during Franklin's traditional Student Appreciation Week, when students are welcomed back to classes each trimester. Promotional items are always handed out during this time, so these items were now tied in to the installation.

The campaign was rotated to the other Franklin locations as well (Dublin and Westerville, Ohio); one installation was at each location at a time. Then the installations would simply rotate between the locations. By executing the campaign in such a manner, it maximized resources while still providing the same experience.

In order to most effectively execute the strategy, only a few messages were needed. This was another unique and intentional aspect of the campaign. The messaging was straightforward and simple. It was easy for students to receive, decode, and remember. After all, "what consumers want from marketers is, simply, simplicity."⁸ Therefore, the same message was repeated in every installation:

9,500 students
48 states
68 countries
Franklin University

This was the only message in every installation and was only on the main piece. The placement of the message was strategic as well. Students could not avoid the message. There was no straight path through the lobby; students had to go through the message. It could not be ignored.

3. Banners

The banners consisted solely of student headshot photos; over 500 photographs of students were taken for this installation alone. The main installation was a ten foot by eight foot banner, with the message in the middle of the prominent piece: 9,500 students, 48 states, 68 countries, Franklin University.

Throughout the lobby were the auxiliary pieces with additional banners. Some of the banners were similar to mobiles, all shapes and sizes. In order to

⁸ P. Spenner, K. Freeman, *To keep your customers, keep it simple*, "Harvard Business Review" May 2012, p. 108-114.

get through the lobby and to class, students had to weave in and out of the hanging banners. Strategically, the banners were also created to be see-through. So students would see the faces in the banners as well as real-life students walking behind the installation. Window clings of students' faces were in the lobby windows, which was the only continuity through the entire campaign.



Figure 1. Banners

Source: Provided by Authors.

Students not only got an idea of the number of students at Franklin, but also of the diversity of the student population. In addition, the pieces were unique and interesting, provoking exploration and examination. Many of the students were looking for their own photographs or photographs of friends. It created a sense of community and camaraderie amongst the students. They belonged.

4. Graphs

In order to illustrate the continual growth in enrollment, the next main installation was a ten foot wide by eight foot high acrylic bar graph. The bar graph was color coded to show the number of face-to-face students downtown, the number of face-to-face students at Franklin's satellite campuses, the number of online students, and the number of e-army students. Again, the main message hung with the graph: 9,500 students, 48 states, 68 countries, Franklin University.

Throughout the lobby were auxiliary graphs representing single years throughout Franklin's history of student enrollment. For the most recent years, the pieces were extremely tall, which was a visual reinforcement of the growth. The graphs



Figure 2. Graphs

Source: Provided by Authors.

were also purposely see-through, so students would again see real-life students going to class through the art.

5. Stand-ups

The stand-ups were life sized, cut-out photographs of international students on campus or students taking online classes outside of the United States. The main installation was again ten feet wide by eight feet tall; this time it was a group of the stand-ups that created a formation similar to a choir. Once again, the message was the same: 9,500 students, 48 states, 68 countries, Franklin University.



Figure 3. Stand-Ups

Source: Provided by Authors.

Each stand-up had a name tag highlighting the student's country of origin, demonstrating Franklin's international reach. In addition to the main installation, stand-ups were dispersed throughout the lobby; they were strategically placed to look like regular student activity. When the real-life students entered the lobby, they would examine each piece's name tag to see the country listed.

6. Methodology

In order to specifically assess the success of the branding campaign, a pre-test and post-test were created. The test was comprised of a short, one-page questionnaire, evaluating responses that aligned with the project's objectives. The pre-test was administered one month before the first installation. The post-test was administered one month after the last installation was taken down. A random sample of classes at Franklin University's main location was used for the survey and analysis. The surveys were packaged with instructions for the teaching faculty to administer in class. The results were then entered into a database for analysis. The *n* for the pre-test was 286 and the *n* for the post-test was 271.

7. Results

Across the entire questionnaire, the survey results showed a dramatic difference in the pre-test and post-test results. First, the chart below illustrates the downtown student population's perception of enrollment before and after the installations. Students were asked to indicate on a five point Likert-type scale whether enrollment has declined, remained stable, or increased since they have been a student attending Franklin. It is clear to see the shift from a perception of stable enrollment to now knowledge of moderate to substantial increase in growth.

For the next question, students were asked which term best describes the student market Franklin University serves and they were instructed to check all that apply in their response. As one can see, another major shift occurred, showing knowledge now that Franklin is a national and international university.

In order to delve deeper in students' perceived notions of Franklin's population, students were not only asked about the market description in general, but they were also asked a couple more specific questions. Students were asked to check how many states (in the U.S.A.) they believed Franklin represented, given five categories. The difference between the pre-test and post-test is clear to see;

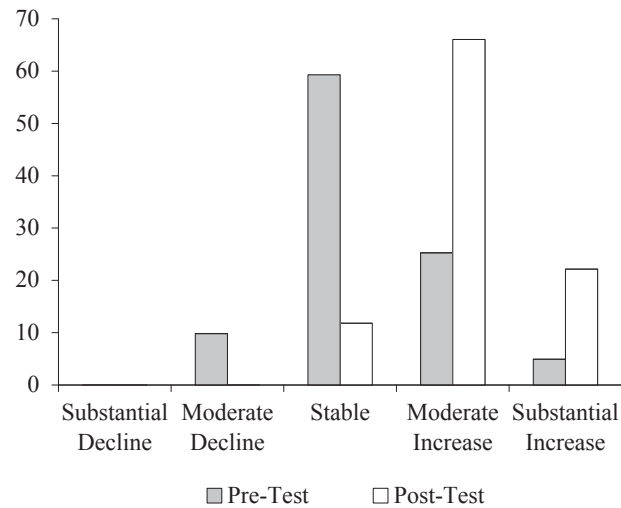


Figure 4. Pre/Post-test Results of Perceived Enrollment (%)

Source: Provided by Authors.

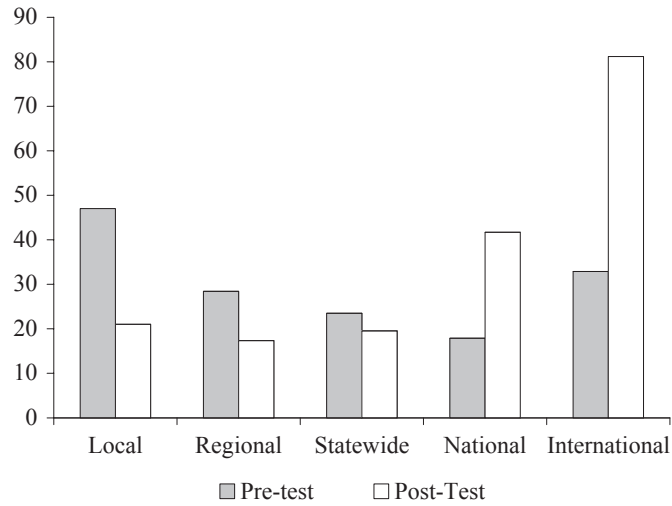


Figure 5. Pre/Post-test Results of the Market Description (%)

Source: Provided by Authors.

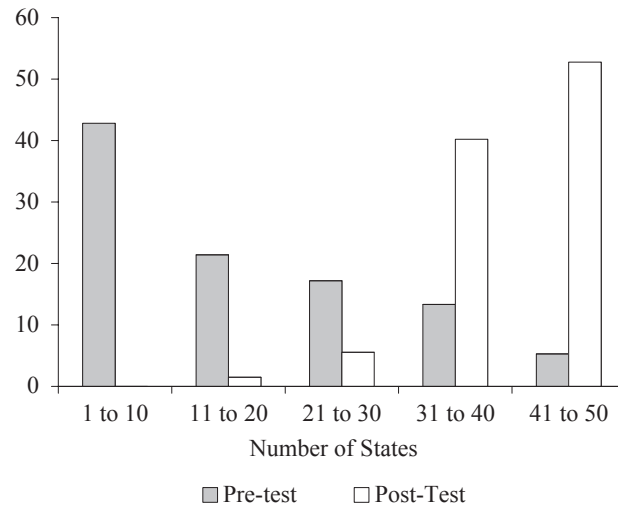


Figure 6. Pre/Post-test Results of Students from a Number of States (%)

Source: Provided by Authors.

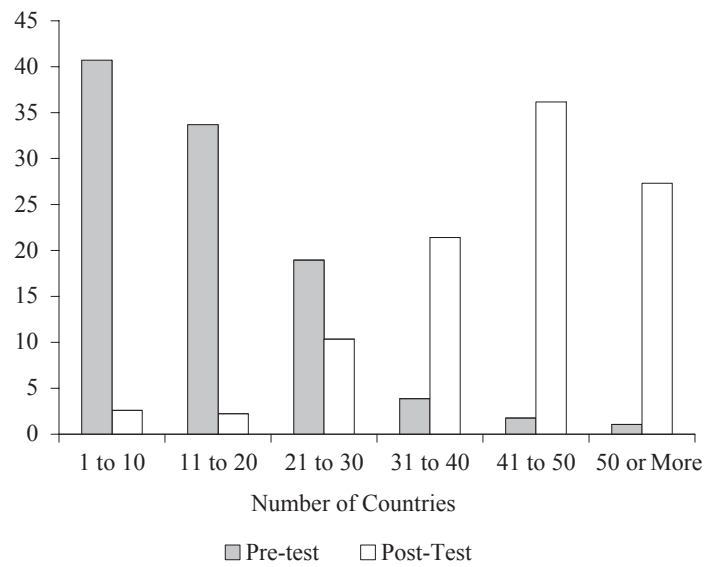


Figure 7. Pre/Post-test Results for Students from a Number of Countries (%)

Source: Provided by Authors.

there is a complete inverse in the number of states indicated by students. This represents a dramatic shift from the perception of being an Ohio-based university to a national university. It also reinforced for Franklin students that the institution was an innovator in online classes.

Similarly, students were asked to indicate the number of countries from which they believed students came from to Franklin, given six categories. Again, there is a complete inverse in the number of countries indicated by students. This represents a dramatic shift from being a regional university to an international university. It also reinforced that Franklin was a diverse university, encompassing many cultures and many countries.

The next question asked students, overall, how they would rate Franklin University's reputation. This question was delivered through a five-point Likert-type scale. While the perceived reputation of Franklin was always good, a significant note is the shift from just having a good reputation to having a very good reputation.

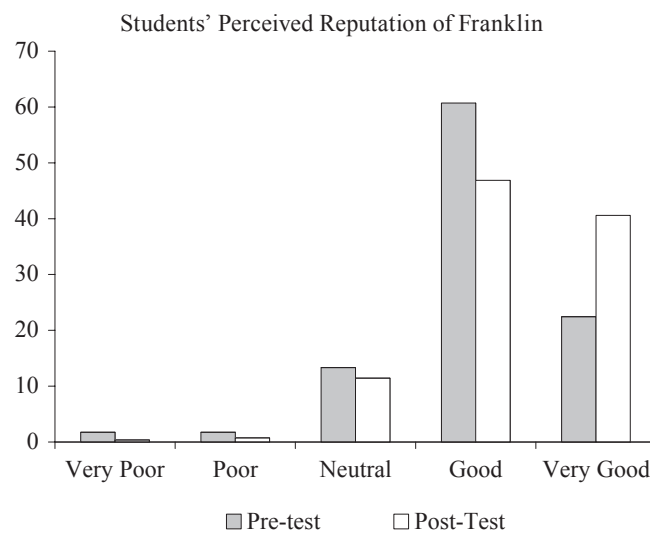


Figure 8. Pre/Post-test Results for Perceived Reputation (%)

Source: Provided by Authors.

In addition to reputation, students were also asked, overall, how satisfied they were with Franklin University. This question was given on a five-point Likert-type Scale. While there was some positive shift at the lower levels of satisfac-

tion, the most significant shift was of satisfied students to very satisfied students. When the results of reputation and satisfaction are coupled, the outcome is not only brand loyal students but brand evangelists for the university. Brand evangelists spread positive word of mouth to family, friends, and coworkers. The campaign changed how the students viewed Franklin and therefore by extension how they viewed their degree. They were getting a degree from a growing, international university, which has added prestige.

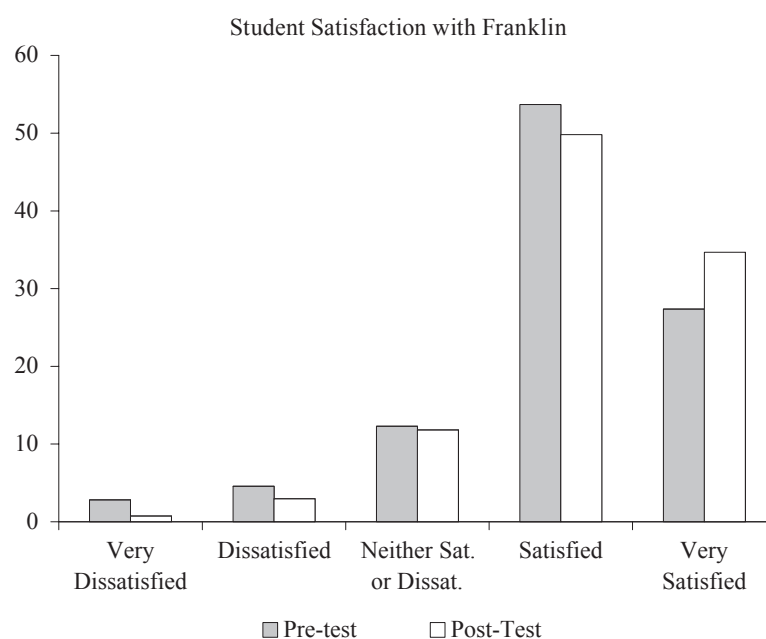


Figure 9. Pre/Post-test Results for Student Satisfaction (%)

Source: Provided by Authors.

In addition, the campaign generated outcomes above and beyond the project objectives. The campaign did in fact change the perception of Franklin's brand for the students. But it also increased brand awareness for the University. A national publication, *University Business*, published an article with photos, highlighting the campaign. Plus, Dr. Doug Ross was awarded the American Marketing Association Columbus Region Most Innovative Campaign Award for the year. Therefore, the Faces of Franklin campaign exceeded expectations and was a prestigious success for the branding of Franklin University.

8. Conclusion

It is widely accepted that “to succeed higher education institutions must create a consistent, powerful identity that provides them with a competitive advantage. The university brand must speak to who they are and the qualities that set them apart.”⁹ With the multitude of messages consumers receive, it is a difficult challenge to communicate the essence of a brand and even more difficult of a challenge to change those perceptions of a brand once they are entrenched. Research shows that “all the constructs of university image – personality, reputation, and external prestige – had positive influences on students’ supportive attitudes toward the university.”¹⁰ The Faces of Franklin campaign directly affected students’ perceptions of the University’s reputation and levels of satisfaction, and therefore changed the way students viewed their institution. The campaign dramatically enhanced the brand image of Franklin University, successfully differentiating the institution in the competitive environment.

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⁹ K.M. Lancendorfer, *The branding of higher education: The great awakening in the hallowed halls of academia*, “American Academy of Advertising Conference Proceedings” 2007, 242.

¹⁰ M. Sung, S. Yang, *Toward the model of university image: The influence of brand personality, external prestige, and reputation*, “Journal of Public Relations” 2008, No. 20(4), p. 357-376.