

Montana University System
College!NOW Initiative
Two-year Brand Pilot Marketing Campaign Overview

Strategies 360

Board of Regents Meeting, November 2013

Pilot Campaign Overview

As part of the College!NOW initiative, the Montana University System has increased communications about two-year higher education in Montana in order to enhance public understanding of the programs, degrees, and opportunities available at two-year colleges throughout our state. These efforts included the renaming and rebranding of Montana's public two-year colleges as well as the development of a statewide two-year higher education brand.

In order to determine how to best implement the market research-based statewide brand strategy effectively and efficiently, the Montana University System initiated a pilot two-year education brand marketing campaign, and City College at MSUB served as the test campus. A team was assembled to carry out the pilot campaign and included key leadership from City College at MSUB, Montana State University Billings, the Office of Commissioner of Higher Education, and the College!NOW communications firm Strategies 360.

The pilot campaign ran from June 10, 2013, through October 31, 2013. The key campaign message asked the question "What's your plan?" and established City College at MSUB as the answer. Such a question is familiar to any person wanting to pursue a degree or certificate necessary for starting or advancing a career.

The campaign further reinforced the career possibilities opened up through an education at City College at MSUB by highlighting the true success stories of current and former students as well as faculty and staff for whom a two-year education was also part of their plan. Because the prospective student population of two-year colleges is extremely diverse, success stories were chosen to reflect people of varying ages, backgrounds, and areas of study. These stories showed audiences engaged with the campaign how the programs, degrees, and certificates available at City College at MSUB translate into successful careers or advanced degrees.

The pilot campaign team developed a strategic plan that included social media, online content relevant to prospective students, targeted online advertising, traditional advertising, and grassroots community events. The bulk of the campaign's resources were put toward:

- Developing relevant content, including blog posts, interviews, and videos reflecting the shared values, challenges, and aspirations of Montana's two-year prospective student population. This content appeared on the campaign blog, Facebook page, and in promoted Facebook posts and ads.
- Developing a social media presence that communicates actionable information about the degrees, certificates, and support available at City College at MSUB. The social media presence included a campaign blog and a campaign Facebook page.

- Developing, designing and implementing targeted online advertising that included banner ads, search engine marketing ads, Facebook ads, and Craigslist ads. The ads directed target audiences to relevant program content and a “Request Information” form on the campaign blog where prospective students were able to enter their contact information to receive more information about a program of interest from a City College representative.
- Communicating with prospective students engaged with the campaign. Recruiters at City College, as well as Dean Riley, were active in emailing and calling the list of prospective students who requested more information from the campaign sites to answer their questions and encourage them to apply. Additionally, the campaign sent out a series of trackable, branded email blasts to prospective students with messages from the Dean regarding enrollment opportunities, financial aid, and events.

Privileging the online aspects of the campaign enabled the project team to track how people were engaging with the campaign and allowed them to adjust the campaign according to audience response. Because Facebook allows people to share and comment on content, the campaign was also able to engage in a dynamic dialogue with engaged audiences. This strategy resulted in a robust campaign with high engagement in the target areas.

Pilot Campaign Findings

Content Delivery

Video content in which current and former students were able to tell their own stories resonated with audiences and produced the greatest amount of engagement. Posting and promoting videos of students talking about their degrees often resulted in a spike in requests for more information about specific programs.

Focus on Community

The campaign’s strategy placed an emphasis on communicating “place” and “community” in the campaign content and design. The tactic of featuring real City College students and graduates living and working in the Billings region appeared to resonate with target audiences. These local success stories demonstrated that City College was part of the target audience’s community, which increased trust, interest and engagement with the campaign. The success stories also reinforced the key connections between City College and local employers.

Advertising Investment

Using social media in tandem with targeted online advertising proved to be effective for engaging key audiences. In particular, prospective students that include adult learners, veterans, and Native Americans. The Facebook page received approximately 2,000 “Likes” and approximately 250 requests for more information about specific programs at City College at MSUB during the course of the pilot campaign. The campaign advertising investment proved to have a direct effect on the rate of prospective students requesting more information as well as the rate of community engagement with the campaign.

Outcomes

OCHE and Strategies 360 are currently engaging with the marketing directors at the Montana University System's colleges and universities to develop a plan for implementing the *What's Your Plan?* campaign at a statewide level. The pilot campaign findings have already supported the launch of a social media campaign to raise awareness about Gallatin College's impact on its community.

Two-year Statewide Brand *What's Your Plan?* Campaign Creative

CITY COLLEGE
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

**MY PLAN INCLUDED
A DEGREE FROM
CITY COLLEGE AT MSUB.**

**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**

ANN, NURSE, NORTHERN CHEYENNE WELLNESS CENTER
CLASS OF '97 AND '13

CITY COLLEGE
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

**MY PLAN AFTER
THE MILITARY IS
AN ASSOCIATES
DEGREE.**

**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**

JOSH, CITY COLLEGE AT MSUB STUDENT, MILITARY VETERAN
CLASS OF '15



**MY NEW CAREER
PLAN STARTED WITH
CITY COLLEGE AT MSUB.**



**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**

TERRI, CONSOLE SUPERVISOR, EXXONMOBIL BILLINGS REFINERY
CLASS OF '06



**MY MID-LIFE CAREER
PLAN STARTED WITH A
CERTIFICATE PROGRAM.**



**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**

DELANE, OWNER OF BLUE BODY & PAINT
CLASS OF '90



**MY PLAN STARTED
WITH AN ASSOCIATES
DEGREE.**



**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**

MARSHA RILEY, DEAN OF CITY COLLEGE AT MSUB



**MY PLAN STARTED
WITH DEGREES FROM
CITY COLLEGE AT MSUB.**



**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**



**MY PLAN STARTED
WITH A PROGRAM AT
CITY COLLEGE AT MSUB.**

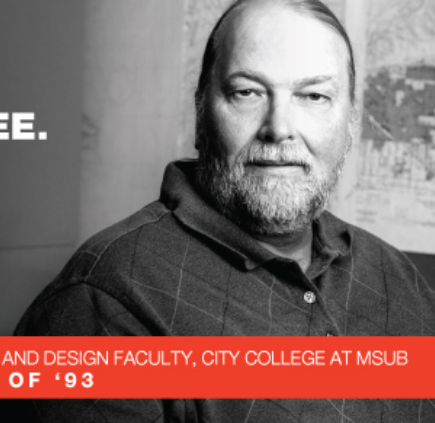


**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**

PATRICK, PARAMEDIC FIREFIGHTER, BILLINGS FIRE DEPT.
CLASS OF '03 AND '07



**MY PLAN INCLUDED
AN ASSOCIATES DEGREE.**



**WHAT'S
YOUR
PLAN?**

TIM, DRAFTING AND DESIGN FACULTY, CITY COLLEGE AT MSUB
CLASS OF '93