TRADITION PRIDE OPPORTUNITY

A Comprehensive, Integrated Marketing/Communications Strategy

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I. Executive Summary

As Southern Illinois University’s largest and oldest organization, the SIU Alumni Association – a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit entity – supports the university by facilitating the connections between its alumni, students and friends. The programs and initiatives by which the Association achieves its mission are myriad, and while key messaging has previously been developed to help the organization broadly communicate its purpose, more refined terms were needed for brevity and clarity.

With that in mind, the Association has coalesced its key messaging under a concept of three pillars – Tradition, Pride and Opportunity. The Association maintains tradition, instills and promotes pride and provides opportunities for students and alumni alike. These three pillars provide a quick and easy explanation behind the value of becoming an Association member and can be tied to any and all of the programs associated with the organization.

Tradition: SIU alumni have a shared identity built on the boundless experience they received from their alma mater. As the connections grow, so do the traditions; the Association keeps all of them active and thriving around the world.

Pride: Saluki pride is when the energy of the past and the promise of the future come together. The Association shares stories of this pride and continues to foster it in everything we do. Salukis make an impact; the Association helps create the momentum. Together, we are unstoppable.

Opportunity: Salukis never meet closed doors. Alumni create a network of connections, great reputations supporting even greater opportunities for the future. The Association facilitates Salukis helping Salukis every day, in every way possible.

These organizational pillars are a useful tool for helping the SIU Alumni Association penetrate our market with greater clarity and awareness for how exactly membership supports the university. Hence, they should be incorporated heavily in the organization’s messaging, advertising, promotion and membership pieces.

What follows is an examination of the Association’s membership and of opinions expressed by individuals, who are both member and non-member alumni and students. Information was collected during a random sampling survey of 5,000 SIU alumni and students in early 2015.
II. Situational Analysis

Company Description

The Association was established in 1896 by a group of students who wanted to continue involvement with their alma mater after graduation. Membership is open to students, alumni and friends of the university. It currently operates as a non-profit 501 (c) (3) corporation. The Association now hosts the award-winning Extern Program, approximately 70 events per year, and has more than 30 constituent organizations that bring together alumni, students and friends.

SIU Alumni Association SWOT Analysis

The following analysis represents a snapshot of the current climate and internal and external factors facing the SIU Alumni Association.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Core programs are established (Extern Program, Homecoming, scholarships)</td>
<td>• No standard marketing plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extensive network of alumni and friends</td>
<td>• Awareness for student membership is low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Located on campus</td>
<td>• The three organizational pillars are not known by a majority in all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connections with other departments on campus</td>
<td>segments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No strong alumni brand off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Core infrastructure is threatened by budget cutbacks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Utilize social media to bring together alumni and students</td>
<td>• Budgets being further decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create a comprehensive marketing plan to reach all target segments</td>
<td>• Further employment gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instill a sense of philanthropy in our students to increase engagement</td>
<td>• Information and promotion overload on our target segments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implement best practices for out constituent groups</td>
<td>• Continued lack of awareness of the Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on events that are having an impact on strategic goals</td>
<td>• Members and non-members do not accept the organizational pillars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Target Market

The target market for the SIU Alumni Association consists of different segments: alumni, student and friends of the university. They are broken down below:

Geographic

Alumni are spread out all around the world. However, a majority live within the United States, which makes it the main focus. Illinois has the greatest number of alumni, as well as the greatest number of members. Southern Illinois, specifically, is the top geographical region based on membership numbers, with heavy alumni saturation in the Chicago and St. Louis metro markets.

Demographic

Based on a sample monthly membership report, one can derive the membership population demographic is 87% alumni and 13% under the category of friends. Male members are the majority with 59%, with the female population consisting of 40%. The majority age group is 60-69, which contains 4,405 members. The smallest age group is 90 and over. A majority are in the College of Education with 26%. The School of Medicine has the least, with less than 1%.

Psychographic

When examining our membership utilizing PRIZM segmentation, most SIU alumni fall under segment number 09 – Big Fish, Small Pond (Upscale Older w/o Kids), with 3,499 members falling into this category. These people are stated to have the lifestyle and media traits of shopping at Talbots, going sailing, reading Kiplinger’s Personal Finance, watching the Kentucky Derby and driving a Toyota Sedan.

Marketing Mix

Service

The Association engages, alumni, students and friends with each other and the campus. Also offered are events, constituent organizations to join, discounts to redeem and the ability to support the university, either through financial support or volunteerism.

Price

Price depends on what type of membership is purchased: student, alumni/friend and individual, joint or life. Perception of the value of membership is lacking. Stated from the survey, annual and life members find that membership is only moderately valuable, meaning there is a potential disconnect with how price matches value.
Place

Offices for the Association are on campus; however, we pride ourselves on having a national reach via constituent organizations. This thought may be one sided; however, because some members surveyed felt there isn’t enough impact from SIU at a nationwide level. Creating more of a national excitement is important moving forward.

Promotion

The promotions aspect of the Association covers a variety of marketing communications that vary between events and the Association itself. Calling campaigns are utilized for increasing membership. Other promotional methods are social media posts and advertisements, direct mail, posters/flyers, newspapers, and the SIU Alumni, which is sent out quarterly.

Competitive Analysis

The Association has few direct competitors in the immediate region. The organization can compete with other membership-based entities, for instance, other alumni associations from a university that an alumni or his or her spouse has attended. There is some mind share competition from school specific alumni groups within SIU Carbondale, such as the School of Law and School of Medicine. These groups are not dues-paying organization; however, they do offer similar benefits, such as networking and events.

On a national level, there are indirect competitors that include services and philanthropic organizations. Based on the benefits the Association membership provides, such as discounts, magazine, early event invites, webinars, it is in competition with other convenience/entertainment services an individual might include in their monthly budget. To look at our organization as a means of supporting the university, our organization is in competition with other philanthropic organizations, perhaps those that are in closer proximity to an alumni and occupy a greater portion of the individual’s time and energy.

III. Communication Objectives

Communication goals

Awareness

- Increase awareness of what the Association does
  - Specifically the three organizational pillars: tradition, pride and opportunity
- Increase awareness that student members can become a part of membership
Credibility

- Increase the perceived value of the SIU Alumni Association by existing and new customers
  - This value will be seen throughout all mediums discussed below and by showcasing the three pillars

Action

- Increase direct action for all types of membership
  - Especially with annual members turning to life members
- Increase engagement with our alumni, students and friends

Positioning

Positioning is the way that a company attempts to create a distinct impression of their business in the customer's mind. It is an attempt to get inside the head of a consumer and influence his or her thinking regarding the product. The goal is to have consumers think favorably of the Association, in order to create more value than already portrayed. Positioning will assist the direct action goals of annual members turning to life members. The perception in consumer’s mind can most likely be influenced by education of the three pillars: tradition, pride and opportunity. As well as showing that the Association is not only for those in or around Carbondale, Illinois. Location was seen as an issue throughout the survey. These two goals of positioning will need to be completed throughout multiple different platforms.

IV. Communication Strategy

Product Concept

Product concept refers to the idea that consumers favor products that offer the most quality, performance, or innovative features (Arens, Weigold, Arens, 2009). Meaning, value is important to portray. In this case, the product refers to the consumer perception of the SIU Alumni Association as a membership, and everything that entails. For annual and life members, value is only moderate. Students; however, found membership slightly valuable. The product is a main issue to focus on moving forward, and should be seen as what the Association is offering.

Target Audience

In considering the target audience, the Association needs to focus on serving the needs of the entire Saluki nation. The target audience is potentially long-term customers, as long as the consumer is satisfied with everything membership provides. The target audience is students, alumni and friends of SIU, usually age 18 and above. The target market is broken up into different categories: non-member students and alumni, student and annual members and
life members. Friends tend to have a close relationship or relatives to students and alumni, or have a close connection to SIU, such as teachers and employees.

Communications Media

Below are all the vehicles that are most important to transmit the Association message. Every medium was chosen to focus on the best form of communication, which was based on the communication survey.

Traditional Media

Magazine

The *SIU Alumni* is an important form of communication and an informative medium for members, and non-members alike. Overall, around 88% utilize the magazine to stay informed with the Association and campus, it’s the top choice for annual and life members. It was stated as a good way to break the location barrier of those who do not reside near or on campus. There is a potential to bridge the gap with traditional media and digital media, in order to increase engagement. Social media tied with articles in the current magazine can support communication and increase excitement for membership. We publish tweets and Facebook comments in our magazine. But including a social media push on what’s coming up in our magazine can increase the conversation between one another and instill pride in the university and the magazine. Simultaneously, the Association is creating more of a national focus.

Digital Media

Association Website

The Association website was updated a couple of years ago; however, it is still not a destination site on the web. A majority of all respondents never or rarely visit. When they do, it is mostly for upcoming events, or to read the news stories and headlines. There is potential to clean up these sections, in order to make it easier and more appealing, so it will be more of a destination spot. Since registration and more information is not all on Facebook, making event pages clean is important. An easy way to do this is to put items into categories, and have pictures for each, so it is appealing to the eye. University of Notre Dame’s Association page¹ is one to admire and to be looked to for future progress. Also, all target markets receive news on their mobile device. Verifying that the Association website is mobile friendly is crucial, specifically when it comes to the news links in the Associations’ emails.

Another feature that should be utilized is connecting the website to social media. As well as allowing people to share and communicate on particular news stories or events on their own social media pages, this will increase interaction with other alumni. The website should also have a page dedicated to the three pillars that defines what they are to the organization

and how we strive to meet those pillars on a daily basis. Another page that should be created on our website is a page of what an Association membership does for students, since this demographic tends to not know that membership is for them. This should be added in the “Students” tab and should focus on the benefits received; specifically, the opportunities provided to students.

**Emails (including the Saluki Pride e-Newsletter)**

Emails and the e-Newsletter is another digital form that members use to stay informed with the Association, students in particular. However, the Saluki Pride is skimmed to find out if it is important over all target markets, while annual and life members are the ones who will usually read the issue, those are the engaged readers. It is not realistic to think that everyone is going to read every word of the Association’s emails and e-Newsletters. It should be known that alone, email open rates are not the only important factor, it is if the email met its overall goal. Such actions could include volunteers signing up for Volunteer SIU, guest registering for an event, people spreading the word about the organization or story (social media) and brand recognition. In the digital age, readers receive tons of emails, so the subject line should be stated clearly in 6-10 words why they should care what is written (Neely, 2015). Another issue is all emails should be mobile friendly. It was stated in the survey that 57% access the internet through a mobile phone. This means that emails not mobile friendly is not an option. Font size should be big enough to read, it is stated that 16 point font is the minimum. Buttons should also be big enough to be clickable (50 pixels). It needs to be looked into if Interspire can register if a recipient is using a mobile device or a computer.

**Social Media**

Social media is an important medium, and is not utilized to the fullest potential. Its true purpose should be to enhance the online social community with effective communication tools for all friends, members and students at SIU. As well as focusing on the organizations three pillars.

*Facebook* is still the platform that the majority of students, annual and life members utilize and is the network that the Association is most followed. However, more engagement needs to be made moving forward. It currently has a feel of being one-way communication, which is the opposite of the overall goal. Benchmarks need to be reinstated, magazine integration should be implemented and connecting SIU with random events, such as National Dog Day, needs to be executed in order to further the reach of SIU and make material relevant. Also, this platform must increase the education of our pillars. This can be done by utilizing the created hashtags whenever possible. This will allow us to share what we are doing, as well as get alumni, students and friends engaging with us through those hashtags.
### Proposed schedule for Facebook and Twitter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Weekly Schedule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notable Alumni</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one social media that needs to be focused on is LinkedIn. This platform makes sense due to its professional nature that most of those surveyed utilize it. More action needs to be made, in order to connect and inform our users. As an Association, sharing content on this platform is crucial, because alumni connections will see it and interact with it. Dedicating a few minutes daily to post meaningful content so that our connections can engage with each other and the Association is beneficial. It has been used to assist with career resources, job postings on the site take a form of its own, and other alumni will post open positions. As well as collaboration and connection between alumni and students.

In our survey, multiple students mentioned utilizing Snapchat. This avenue can be looked into in order for the community to receive exclusive pictures of events, campus and more. This can also assist with showing that the Association is student friendly. In the survey, student members chose to become a member because of the advantages, showcase these items on this platform. Western Michigan University\(^2\) and University of Michigan\(^3\) has a Snapchat account and can be a frame of reference. The graphic designer should put a maroon shirt and the Association logo on the Snapchat ghost, and should be put on other platforms to increase Snapchat followers.

The rest of our social media platforms: Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Flickr and YouTube, need to be continually updated. Students utilize Instagram and Pinterest, so those platforms need to be looked at to cater toward this demographic. Students stated that our platforms (most follow on Facebook and Twitter) are informational; however, the platforms need improvement.

**Support Media**

**Packaging of the Association**

Day to day actions that will help attract new, and retain existing customers need to be implemented. The first point of contact, which is usually the front office, should be able to

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adequately respond to questions, or be able to transfer to the appropriate parties effectively. Moving forward, the three pillars are what the Association provides. This should be made apparent in every form of communication. Defining the pillars and how we strive for them needs to be in the “About Us” section on the Association website. In order to understand the Association, figuring out the product seems to not work; however, what the product stands for is important and that is answered with the pillars.

**Publicity**

Publicity is important moving forward with our pillars by promoting what we continue to do to maintain tradition, instill and promote pride and provide opportunities. Mediums that are stated to work in the survey are the magazine and emails. One important factor to think of for publicity is reaching a wider audience, not just locally, but nationally. This issue was stated multiple times in the survey.

**Media Objectives**

- Concentrate the largest weight of advertising on educating the pillars, in order to increase awareness of what the Association does
- Since awareness is key, frequency over all mediums is required in order to educate
- Create more national excitement between alumni, students and friends

**Communication Message**

In order to make all communication integrated, and have alumni, students and friends remember the importance of the Association, the three pillars of what we stand for and our mission needs to be instilled in everything we do, from social media to the magazine. *The Journal of Integrated Marketing Communication* refers to IMC as "a strategic marketing process specifically designed to ensure that all messaging and communication strategies are unified across all channels and are centered around the customer” (What is IMC).

These pillars encompasses supporting and staying informed with the university, staying connected to the home of the Salukis and maintaining loyalty to their alma mater. Based on the communication survey, this is why most chose to become annual and life members of the SIU Alumni Association. However, member advantages, specifically to students, are an important factor. When asked if we were meeting expectations, a majority of each category stated yes; nonetheless, having no or little expectations came up often in the open ended responses. As well as annual and student members finding that they know just a little about the Association, while life members know a fair amount. Increasing that knowledge of what the Association does will create a tighter bond, and get annual members to most likely become life members, when they realize what the Association does for the University, its students and alumni. Focusing on these pillars and showcasing them on all platforms can also increase the reach and help with engagement, which will increase “national excitement”.
Communication Effectiveness

Campaign: Salukis Stand On Tradition, Pride, and Opportunity

Packaging the Association

As previously mentioned, packaging the Association is done by what it provides; tradition, pride and opportunity. This should help increase the value that is portrayed of the Association and positively impact the future of the organization. As well as verifying that the first point of contact and all points of contact are effective.

Magazine

The magazine is already a medium that is utilized for information, so it is already effective. However, combining it with other media platforms, such as social media, will increase the reach and will drive online engagement.

Social Media

Social media is a low cost form of communication with potential and existing customers. One of the best parts of social media, such as Facebook pages, is that it can be deployed with little to no cost on behalf of the business, while reaching a large customer base (Hendricks, 2014). It also helps increase brand recognition, brand loyalty and inbound traffic to a business and website (DeMers, 2014).

Emails

Emails were stated to be effective, and having too much didn’t come up often in the survey; however, it was stated by a few. Moving forward, making sure emails are maintaining its effectiveness is crucial, oversaturating alumni, friends and students to the point where they no longer will read emails will affect how we communicate and get information out.

Publicity

Publicity for a business is always important. By offering community and national support and showing what the Association is doing on a regular basis will increase the effectiveness of communicating to alumni, friends and students. Publicity will help boost credibility and readership of the business (Business Marketing: Importance of Publicity, 2012).
Communication Campaign Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Month 1</th>
<th>Month 2</th>
<th>Month 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Packaging the</strong></td>
<td>Push out how we define our three pillars website, educate all workers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Association</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Magazine</strong></td>
<td>Publish article about the three pillars</td>
<td>Continue the theme</td>
<td>Continue the theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Utilize designated pillar hashtags in relevant posts</td>
<td>Contest to coincide with the posts, that really focus on getting people engaged</td>
<td>End contest, still have posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emails</strong></td>
<td>Create an image that showcases the pillars to put on the side of all e-newsletters</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publicity</strong></td>
<td>When it occurs</td>
<td>When it occurs</td>
<td>When it occurs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. Testing and Evaluation

Communication Research

This plan contains information from a communication survey that was sent to over 5,000 students, alumni and friends. Another survey should be completed to see if the awareness of what the Association does, and if the value of membership has increased in six months or one full year.

Effectiveness Measurements

To determine the effectiveness is to measure the goals: brand awareness, direct action and community engagement. Each goal has its own key performance indicators, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Awareness</td>
<td>-“likes” on Facebook - Google Analytics - LinkedIn Analytics - # of people who visit the 3 pillars page or student information page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Action</td>
<td>-number of memberships (new and renew), it can also include number of customers at events, online community, Volunteer SIU, depending on the goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Engagement</td>
<td>-based on engagement metrics that are in the process of being made</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different departments will have to work together, especially the Marketing and Social Media areas to make sure measurement is completed and done correctly.

As shown below, there are a variety of websites that show how the Association is doing on social media platforms, this helps to see if what we put out there is working and traveling. This should be done, along with the benchmarks, every month. However, utilizing the measurement sites can and should be completed often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Sites</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Klout</td>
<td>overall online influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweetreach</td>
<td>how far something traveled on twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HowSociable</td>
<td>brand’s visibility on the social web</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. References


