Marketing & Communication Findings Report
Mt. Hood Community College

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Brand and Digital Findings & Recommendations

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Brand and web agencies, Sockeye and ISITE Design were engaged by Mt. Hood Community College (MHCC) to conduct a communications audit, analyze existing online communications tools, and lead a series of stakeholder meetings. The primary purposes being to:

(1) Assess the overall effectiveness of the college's current marketing and communication efforts,

(2) Provide assessment, interpretation and guidance of existing online tools and analytics,

(3) Collect feedback on the MHCC experience and suggest ways for more efficient and productive collaboration.

This report includes:

- A summary that identifies the major themes and issues related to development of clear and strategic communication at MHCC; and
- A discussion that addresses each purpose in the finding report.
- Next Steps

Mount Hood Community College Phase One:
Brand and Digital Findings & Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the process of discovery, Sockeye and ISITE Design reviewed hundreds of marketing publications and online tools and materials, and interviewed faculty, staff, students, community members, high school counselors and the MHCC Board.

We also received more than 1,100 responses to a joint Community/Faculty/Student survey that addressed a wide variety of topics from what programs are most important to them, what is MHCC's 'best quality' and how we can better serve them online.

This report will show that Mt. Hood Community College is recognized for it's excellent programs and faculty, but the shining light in East County has somewhat dimmed over time. There were three main takeaways from the stakeholder meetings:

- MHCC isn't as community focused as it should be. It needs to become more accessible to the community. The MHCC community would greatly benefit from a more inclusive, engaged college.
- Communication challenges exist between administration and faculty, between school and the community, including business partners. There is a need to build trust and respect internally. Need inspired ambassadors who speak and walk the mission of the organization.
- MHCC's value proposition is unclear to those who are not on campus. It has become lost over time and so it needs to be well-defined and lived by it's ambassadors.

OVERVIEW - BRAND AND COMMUNICATION

Identified Challenges

Challenge #1 - A new breed of student

MHCC serves the school districts of Corbett , David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose, Reynolds, Centennial and the Oregon Trail District – a area that encompasses over 950 square miles and more than 49,000*. *Oregon Department of Education elementary, middle and high school students.

District standardized tests show that almost 20% of area's 11th grade students are not meeting the statewide standardized assessment in English/Language, 36% in Math, and 40% in Science. Currently only 30% of district high school seniors go on to higher education. How can MHCC tap the 70% who have no higher education plans?

From survey:

Q. What is the one thing MHCC should focus on?

A. "Creating positive, supportive, safe spaces for underrepresented communities, and instituting policies which reflect this attitude."

Of the many challenges facing MHCC, the challenge of engaging such a diverse population is at the top of the list. The face of the student body has changed. 35% of MHCC's student population identifies as non-Caucasian, compared to 20% of the city of Gresham who identify the same way.* *2010 Census Population diversity can be seen through the 67 languages spoken at MHCC district high schools. In some cases, more than 30% of high school students are English as Second Language. The language barrier becomes more abrupt when you consider the parents of the prospective students.

"Last census showed Hispanic community really growing. Lots of people come here from Latin America and work in hotel or construction fields. I want to see the government and the schools start thinking about educating parents about school."

- Student Stakeholder meeting participant

Incomes on average are lower than the rest of Multnomah County and there are more renters and less homeowners* now than 10 years ago. *2010 Oregon Census Additionally, the cost of education has increased at a rate that is inconsistent with wages. The overall takeaway is that education is more important and needs to be more practical than ever.

From survey:
Q. What is the one thing MHCC should focus on?
A. The desperate financial straits of many of our students. We have an ever-increasing number of students who are hungry, homeless, and without a job or income. The demographics of our service area reflect this alarming statistic. These students cannot succeed at Mt. Hood without extra support. Why isn't this a focus of the college board and Presidents Cabinet? With a campus-wide focus by all college employees and leadership on ALL possible methods of support for food, housing, and financial support, we can contribute to the immediate needs of our students, guarantee more student success, and improve our reputation and image throughout the community by leaps and bounds.

In addition, many students are those who are out of work and are going back to retrain themselves after many years in a career. The makes for an older and less tech-savvy student. They also have responsibilities beyond the classroom. Of the 33,000 students attending MHCC more than 50% are working full- or part-time jobs.

A few additional thoughts from stakeholder meetings on providing better access:

- Eliminating or lowering fees for the "College Success Class" would get more people in the door.
- Getting parents involved early and often.
- Better consider language barriers in both students and parents.
- Community education is a large opportunity to promote college to prospective students
  as an entry point.
- Better supporting those high school students who take college credit classes for credit
  at MHCC.
- Multilingual content at key points throughout the website – tailored to each audiences unique needs.

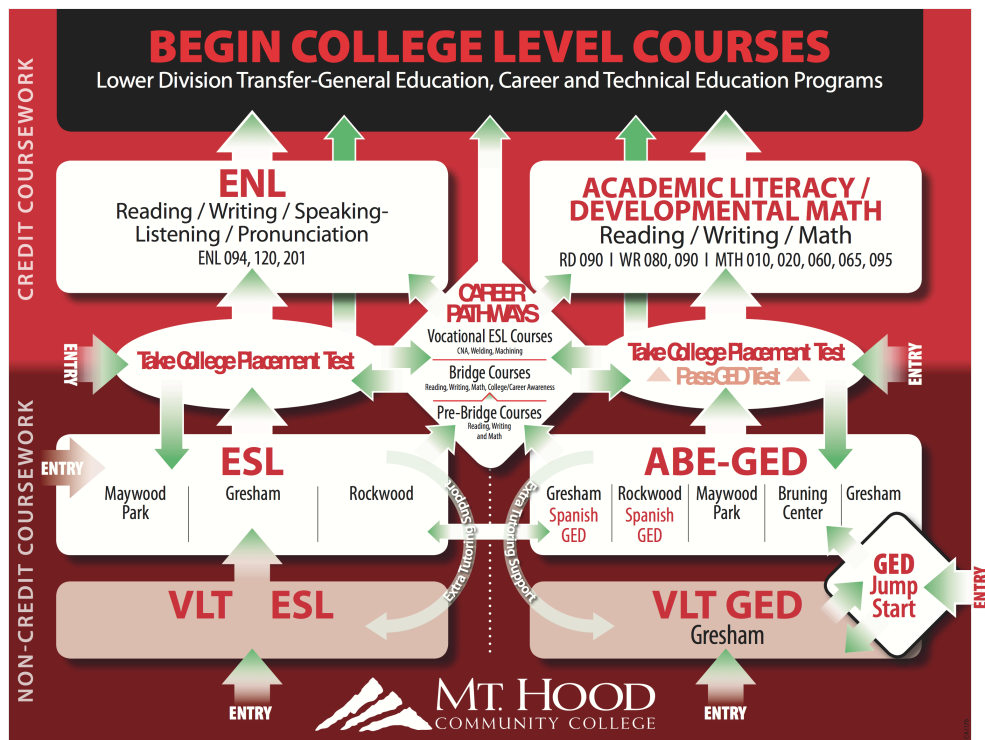*Challenge #2 – Communication: leading to clarity, clear path*

One of the biggest challenges in serving 33,000 students as well as over 1,100 Faculty and Staff is communication. Add in prospective students, community members, and the board and you have a very urgent need to clarify MHCC's offering and offer each audience a clear path to the information they need the most.

Communication Audit - Less vehicles, more access

MHCC produces hundreds of internal and external printed pieces throughout the year in addition to maintaining the website (MHCC.edu) and public relations efforts. The level of effort and resources needed to keep up with publications is outstanding. Yet when asked about the best way to know what's happening on campus, what types of programs MHCC offers, how to apply to sign-up for Financial Aid, most stakeholders didn't find communication clear and had their own story of discovery. With what we now know about the new breed of student it's no wonder that the way we communicate needs to be continually evaluated for effectiveness and ease-of-use.

There is a real shift of schools from moving away from transactional, unilateral language. MHCC is working with students who need to have value propositions given in ways that they can connect with and that helps them through the process. Transactional language sets up the idea of a hurdle. There is a great need to rebuild the story and really get value propositions that are accessible and articulated in an emotional way.

Of the hundreds of pieces reviewed for the Communications Audit, most were transactional— where to go, what steps to take, what programs are available. What seemed to be missing was an emotional, human quality. Many of the pieces developed didn't include photography. And when they did, the photography was out-of-date and uninspired. Additionally, the pieces we reviewed had inconsistent looks and feels. There is a clear need to balance simplicity and sophistication when communicating with each of the MHCC stakeholders.

BEGIN COLLEGE LEVEL COURSES
Lower Division Transfer-General Education, Career and Technical Education Programs

CREDIT COURSEWORK

ENL
Reading / Writing / Speaking-
Listening / Pronunciation
ENL 094, 120, 201

**ACADEMIC LITERACY /
DEVELOPMENTAL MATH**
Reading / Writing / Math
RD 090 | WR 080, 090 | MTH 010, 020, 060, 065, 095

CAREER PATHWAYS
Vocational ESL Courses
CNA, Welding, Machining

Bridge Courses
Reading, Writing, Math, College/Career Awareness

Pre-Bridge Courses
Reading, Writing and Math

ENTRY

Take College Placement Test

Take College Placement Test
Pass GED Test

ENTRY

NON-CREDIT COURSEWORK

ENTRY

ESL

Maywood Park | Gresham | Rockwood

ABE-GED

Gresham Spanish GED | Rockwood Spanish GED | Maywood Park | Bruning Center | Gresham

VLT ESL

VLT GED
Gresham

GED Jump Start

ENTRY

ENTRY

ENTRY

Extra Tutoring Support

MT. HOOD
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

As you can see from the above example, even the best efforts at clarity still may not be very clear, especially for those non-native English speakers or those looking to obtain their GED.

The shear number of publications that are being produced, especially for each program, could be developed with a clear online roadmap and the ability to print on demand. This effort could save thousands of dollars in printing yet still provide the most up-to-date communication to the individual student. Creating audience profiles (Phase 5-6) and clear information journeys will help better map what vehicles are better served for what audience.

Wayfinding and Campus layout

A consistent communication theme throughout all conversations was the need for better campus signage and layout. If we start with a very basic brand question: what are the current campus access points, wayfinding and layout communicate to the audience? We get a variety of answers. To one current student, the green on campus was why she moved to the Northwest. To another, it feels like a jail. To a school counselor, entering through a parking lot and concrete hardscaping 'is another barrier in providing opportunity and access to a student who is already frightened by the daunting college process'. Many current and prospective students find on-campus signage either lacking or unintuitive.

Challenge #3 – COMMUNITY needs to be at the forefront of all decision making.

The MHCC mission is Transforming Lives | Building Communities. The students, staff and faculty spoke to the transformation of lives on a daily basis. The relationship between faculty and student is one of the top reasons students attend MHCC over other colleges. But there is a feeling from all stakeholders that MHCC is largely disconnected from the community.

"We're increasing our rates for event hosting, facilities, cutting back on our ability to offer community events. We can't afford to do things in and for community any longer." –Faculty stakeholder meeting

There were two studies after the 2006 Bond measure failed, to poll the community and see where MHCC would need to better make their case in the future. What one study was found the bond measure was widely supported, but failed in the end due to double majority. The other study looked at the MHCC as a public institution relative to other social services available to people in the district. When the public was asked to rank the institutions in order of importance – higher education came in 5th, 6th, and even 7th out of ten services. In one of the districts, higher education was dead last.

What this shows is that the college has not done a good job in communicating its value to the community. The college has focused on current and prospective students, but not on the dynamics that pay for education, groups that use the school for alternative education options or as a community resource —theaters, athletics, events.

IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITY

With all the players at the table:

FACULTY - advancing the lives of students

ADMINISTRATION - supporting and facilitating the college's mission

STUDENTS - advancing their own lives

COMMUNITY PARTNERS - supporting the college, advancing their own businesses and the providing jobs

COMMUNITY AT LARGE- supporting each other

POTENTIAL STUDENTS - having access to education, options

The college needs to have a shared purpose.

Working together for the same goal. And that goal should be clear to everyone.

MHCC is transforming lives and building community.

OVERVIEW – DIGITAL

The good news is that MHCC's current technology framework is perfectly acceptable for the needs of the college. The applications and platforms in use; Jenzabar, Ektron, Blackboard, etc., are all adequate to the task and are used by many community colleges and universities. The challenge that MHCC faces is with how the platforms and tools were implemented and are currently used. An opportunity exists to unify these systems to create an environment that is more easily updated and supported by the IT team. This unification will also more easily allow the consistency of the look and feel, messaging guidelines and templates identified by the digital governing body.

In addition to the technical audit, ISITE also focused efforts on usability and analytics audits as well as a competitive review and higher education trend research. This research blended with the stakeholder interviews confirmed that MHCC must focus on making up-to-date and accurate information more accessible to all audiences in the digital channel. Through strong leadership from the marketing, IT and PICTF teams the college has a great opportunity to build a strong foundation for the success.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES:

Challenge # 1: Usability/Findability

There is an overwhelming need to provide clear pathways for all audiences within the digital channel. Close attention needs to be paid to the prioritized journeys and goals for each group with a focus on inherent challenges that users may face. These challenges could range from a language barrier to antiquated technology. MHCC needs to build in safeguards against these easily identifiable challenges to ensure users have the best digital interactions possible.

In addition, we heard repeatedly throughout the interview process that it is nearly impossible to find information quickly and easily on the site. One student noted that: "Every time I try to find something on the site, I need to call the switchboard and get transferred to whatever department I'm looking into and even the advising office to do your grades, etc., they literally give you an instruction manual." The websites' current hodgepodge of navigation, lack of hierarchy and competing messaging leaves users at a loss of how to proceed. This, partnered with execution issues with on-site search, create an environment of inconsistent and confusing experiences for users. It was also widely noted that information is spread far and wide across different sections of the site forcing users to navigate through many areas to get a comprehensive answer to a single question.

Opportunity: Structure the site and messaging to reflect what external rather than internal audiences need with a focus on a storytelling style and structure so that users get everything they are looking for in one place.

Challenge # 2: Content

In the digital sphere, content is king. Nearly all stakeholder groups mentioned that the site is riddled with outdated and inaccurate information. It is recognized that a distributed content ownership model and CMS access will allow for faster updates; however, the concerns reach further than just slow information distribution. The Faculty interviews uncovered concern that inconsistent nomenclature may be confusing to certain audiences. In our conversations with the high school counselors it became clear that the college needs to do a better job of up-leveling critical information. In addition, our usability audit uncovered the sites' lack of advanced organizers and signposts which leaves users unable to scan quickly for what they are looking for likely resulting in user frustration and a higher drop-off rate.

Opportunity: Align the digital content with the overarching communication/messaging strategy and the needs of your digital audiences. Execution should include a content audit, reduction strategy, refresh and migration strategy.

Challenge # 3: Disparate digital infrastructure
As with most higher education entities MHCC relies on multiple systems and technologies resulting in a complex digital platform. As stated previously the current technology framework is perfectly acceptable for the needs of the college. There is a need to re-architect and re-implement pieces of the framework to ensure a scalable and sustainable environment moving forward.

Opportunity: Unify digital infrastructure and strive to have seamless integration between systems (both front end and back end) where possible.

Challenge # 4: Limited use of technical best practices
Users experience slow load times and time-outs resulting from antiquated architecture. The site has been pieced together over time creating a challenging environment for support and upgrades as well as disjointed and inconsistent user experiences on the front end.

Opportunity: Create and continually evolve best practice standards within the IT space and the digital channel.

Challenge # 5: Clear measurements for success in the digital channel
Our analytics audit uncovered a lack of consistency in metrics measurement across the digital channel. Further research is needed to determine if there is a lack of clarity around what should be measured or if guidance is needed on best practices for measurement execution. The great news is that MHCC has the proper technology to support various levels of measurement and reporting.

Opportunity: Identify ownership around the metrics that matter within the digital realm at MHCC, define the metrics, and create an execution strategy for measurement moving forward.

Challenge # 6: Leadership/Governance:

There is an opportunity to provide stronger ownership, strategy and messaging plans for the digital channel. These efforts are already underway with the PICTF team and further work within the organization will remedy this situation. Currently there are many rogue sites likely resulting from a lack of clear process, templates and standards. One IT team member said: "IT has never looked at the site as a comprehensive or adequate tool. We post things up there for the small monitory of people who might look, but we don't steer people there". The opportunity to turn this outlook around is well underway, both with the leadership team's efforts and this project.

Opportunity: Create and consistently execute a clear messaging strategy and a clear vision for the role of digital across MHCC. This message needs to come from college leadership and PICTF to be effective. This should also include clear identification for how success is measured across all digital channels.

Challenge # 7 Digital Channel Support Services

MHCC greatly needs a strong support system for the content owners and practitioners within the digital channel. By utilizing the colleges mission to "educate" the marketing and IT teams can influence an environment of digital participation and collaboration.

Opportunity: The IT and marketing teams embrace the role of digital educators within the organization with a focus on empowering and educating users on systems, frameworks and execution of marketing, communication and digital strategies.

HIGH LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Brand and Communication

- Clearly articulate MHCC's value proposition and brand so as to get the entire campus on the same page with respect to mission, competitive advantage, graphic standards, signage, images, key messages and language.
- Implement key integrated processes to foster campus support for brand marketing and begin to coordinate messages and activities.
- In order to affect the above, MHCC needs to make investments in permanent staffing and communication funding.

Digital

Leadership/Governance/Service:

- Identify clear ownership and responsibility across all digital channels. (Think specifically about who owns and regulates social media outlets as this is often overlooked).
- Define a simple workflow for access and execution rights, approvals and "content pushes" for you CMS and other publishing systems.
- Create a comprehensive training program related to the digital platform that is not fully reliant on "trainers".
- Create an environment that fosters user groups, peer support and the mindset that coordination is more attractive than going it alone.
- Clearly define digital policies, procedures and oversight to define rules of engagement and service level agreements.
- Set clear requirements for compliance.
- Foster an environment of support versus enforcement.

Technology/Best Practices:

- Design and implement a best practices based technical architecture that eases efforts around future updates, changes and adjustments.
- Build identified system integration points into the architecture.
- Implement source control.

Usability/Findability:

- Configure on-site search to be separate from organic search.

- Identify and execute a clear and flexible taxonomy that will allow for future growth.

- Clean up navigation structures within the site and use consistently throughout.

- Standardize templates and template usage.

- Up-level important information based on audience needs.

- Limit competing messaging/goals on critical pages and pathways.

Content:

- Identify systems of record and integrate those systems appropriately to avoid updating information multiple times across the digital channel.

- Build audience friendly nomenclature into your communication strategy and execute it consistently across all channels. (Avoid communicating with your audiences as if they were experts within your field.)

- Set clear messaging tactics for each prioritized audience and journey and execute across all channels.

- Create editorial schedules for all digital channels (with a focus on social media).

Measurement:

- Identify metrics that matter backed by a concise measurement and optimization strategy.

- Train marketing and IT teams on what can be measured and the best way to implement tracking within the site(s).

- Define what information needs to be share with whom within the organization so that concise dashboards and reports can be generated consistently.

Next Steps

- Deliver a creative brief as a guide to the re-branding and College identity efforts
- Define audiences and create stakeholder examples representing the different groups and their use and interest in the brand and digital communication tools.
- Deliver a documented brand strategy tracking back to business goals.
- eliver a documented digital strategy tracking back to business goals.