

Mount St. Mary's University | Proposed Brand Perception Study

July 9, 2015

Overview

Mount St. Mary's University seeks a brand perception study – providing an essential foundation for a strategy advancing the Mount's brand identity and refining the university's marketing communications plan.

In addition to measuring baseline perception among key audiences, the research should be tailored to explore existing brand associations and test reactions to possible future positioning strategies for the university. The research findings should also identify positioning recommendations, audience assessments and competitive analysis.

Several fundamental assumptions should influence and inform this research process:

- The only sustainable market position for the Mount is one in which the university offers something different and distinct from comparison schools.
- The strategy for building the Mount's identity must emphasize tangible assets that are meaningful to external target audiences. These assets should motivate prospects to choose the university over another institution, as well as engender a sense of pride among internal audiences.
- The Mount's brand strategy must be embraced by the university community – faculty and staff, in particular – who are significantly involved in living the brand. As a result, the brand strategy must identify assets that are authentic and a strong fit with internal values.

Brand Perception Research | Qualitative and Quantitative Studies

During this phase of the project, three key audiences will be studied as part of the university brand perception research – with the research findings used to pinpoint the Mount's brand identity strategy. Each audience is listed below with specific details about the research process.

Note ... the following parameters are purposely general in nature and should be viewed as a starting place for further discussion with the Mount. The final research design will be decided after budgetary constraints, full scope of research, and priorities are clearly outlined.

Audience I | Prospective Undergraduate Students

Purposes

- Explore factors influencing choice of educational institution
- Explore existing associations with the Mount
- Compare the Mount to competitor institutions
- Uncover brand narrative that resonates most with prospective students and that is perceived to be most authentic

Sampling Frame

- Prospective undergraduate students who have inquired to the Mount and prospective undergraduate students who have NOT inquired to the Mount

Proposed Qualitative Research Design

- Two online focus groups
- Approximately 10 participants per group
- Online focus groups led by a moderator and involving discussion via phone, supplemented by an online tool that provides visual stimuli
- Findings should be combined with other qualitative findings to hone positioning strategies tested in quantitative research

Proposed Quantitative Research Design

- Online survey, 20 minutes in length
- Sample size approximately 400
- Instrument may branch based on geography, program of interest, academic ability, etc.
- Analysis may include geography and academic ability, as well as the Mount's inquirers vs. non-inquirers

Audience II | Parents of Prospective Undergraduate Students

Purposes

- Explore factors influencing choice of educational institution
- Explore existing associations with the Mount
- Compare the Mount to competitor institutions
- Uncover brand narrative that resonates most with parents of prospective students and that is perceived to be most authentic

Sampling Frame

- Parents of prospective undergraduate students who have inquired to the Mount and parents of prospective undergraduate students who have NOT inquired to the Mount

Proposed Quantitative Research Design

- Phone survey, 12 minutes in length
- Sample size approximately 400
- Analysis may include geography and income, as well as parents of Mount inquirers vs. non-inquirers

Audience III | High School Guidance Counselors

Purposes

- Explore image and identity of the Mount
- Explore existing associations with the Mount
- Compare the Mount to competitor institutions
- Uncover brand narrative that resonates most with external audiences and that is perceived to be most authentic

Sampling Frame

- High school guidance counselors of interest to the Mount

Proposed Qualitative Research Design

- 20 in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted by phone
- Each approximately 20 minutes in length

Reporting and Presentations of Findings | Deliverables

Qualitative Report

- This report will detail all findings from the focus groups with prospective students, as well as the IDIs with high school guidance counselors

Qualitative Presentation

- This report will detail all findings from the survey research of prospective students and parents of prospective students

Note: On-campus meetings and open forums with Mount St. Mary's University admissions and university communications teams, as well as senior leadership, will be scheduled as necessary.

Please respond to this proposed brand perception study by July 29, 2015.

Duffy Ross

Director of University Communications

Mount St. Mary's University, Emmitsburg, MD

ross@msmary.edu | 301.447.5366