

**Excalibur Award Submission ♦ University at Buffalo School of Management
Creative Templates (Division One B – Projects, Category 20 – Creative Tactics)**

RESEARCH AND PLANNING

The Office of Communications in the University at Buffalo School of Management, with a staff of 1.5, supports a student base of nearly 4,000 and a staff of approximately 130, and is responsible for the public relations and media relations for the School of Management, strategic overview of the school's website and its content, the school's general publications and communications, as well as maintaining a consistent image and brand for the school.

The School of Management operates in a relatively decentralized manner, with separate offices for Undergraduate, Graduate and Executive Education Administration, offices for Alumni and External Relations, and academic program offices for Accounting and Law, Finance and Managerial Economics, Management Science and Systems, Marketing, Operations Management and Strategy, and Organization and Human Resources.

In 2009, using the results of extensive surveys to our many publics: current and prospective students, parents, donors, alumni, employers, community and other stakeholders, we refreshed the look and feel of our website, brochures, view books and other publications and revised the content to reflect the strengths identified in the surveys: real-world learning, community and economic impact, and the global nature of our programs. These "themes of excellence" would be the basis for much of our future content.

Materials that fell under the direction of the Communications Office were coming together for a unified, consistent, high-quality look and the messaging was reflective of the school's mission and vision. Yet despite this progress, there were challenges. As a state-funded institution, our budgets had been decimated. Priority was (rightfully) given to areas that ensured quality teaching, but after three years of extensive budget cuts, the communications staff was highly under-resourced with barely enough staff, time and budget to achieve the overall school-wide initiatives. The office simply could not support individual departmental initiatives such as the accounting newsletter and frequent requests for us to develop "one-time" publications for special events or projects. In addition, staff across the school had indicated a desire for an internal newsletter to increase their knowledge of other departments and their connection to each other, yet it was not high on the school's strategic list, so it was not given priority.

Outsourcing the work resulted in quality materials, but it was exorbitantly expensive and not always consistent with our brand. As a result, some departments were creating their own materials in-house and the end product was low-quality work that was not at all consistent with our brand and image (see *Appendix A* - accounting newsletter). Rather than shutting down these initiatives, the assistant dean/director of communications sought to provide a creative solution.

Goals/Objectives - The goal, rather than trying to get more staff and more money to do more work, was to provide guidance and templates that would empower individual offices and departments to produce their own materials as needed with minimal drain on the already overextended communications staff, yet with results that were high quality and consistent with the school's brand and image. Specific objectives included the following:

- Develop 4 design templates for less than \$2,000 by July 2010 that reflect the school's brand.
 1. Internal newsletter (target audience: staff) to increase knowledge of and connection to school.
 2. Accounting newsletter (target audience: accounting alumni) matching accounting website.
 3. LeaderCORE newsletter template for periodic updates on a new MBA certification program (target audience: Current and prospective LeaderCORE students and coaches, employers).
 4. General School of Management template for single-use projects as needed (target audience: varied).
- Ensure that the templates were consistent with the school's image and brand.
- Ensure that the templates were easy to use, by even the least tech-savvy user.
- Provide editorial and messaging guidelines to ensure quality content to go with look and feel.

EXECUTION

By demonstrating the overall increase in quality and higher level of support that this project would allow the communication's office to provide to its "internal customers," the communications director was able to secure a one-time budget allotment of \$2,000 from the dean's discretionary fund. A design firm was engaged to create the templates but several conditions applied. The templates were created in Microsoft Word to enable the least-skilled individuals to work with them, and they were designed to be consistent with the school's brand. Flexibility was needed for content, but the design was "locked" to ensure consistency. Communications staff provided existing high-quality images from the school to reduce the cost of stock photography and to ensure a more authentic look. Although newsletters would vary in length, each template consisted of five pages to allow flexibility in design based on need, including a branded cover page, two different styles for inside pages, a gift intention form and a back page with a section for mailing labels. Depending on a department's budget, the final product could be printed in-house, externally or (most economically) just used electronically.

For the school's internal newsletter, a school-wide committee was formed to write content from activities all over the school. The part-time communications assistant was chair of the committee, and the newsletter committee surveyed the staff via Survey Monkey to determine what type of stories they wished to see in the new publication and to set their direction moving forward in terms of frequency and length.

RESULTS

- All four templates were completed by July 2010. Design cost was \$1,900 (see *Appendix B* - invoice) for three templates. The fourth (LeaderCORE) was covered by the LeaderCORE budget.
- The first template, completed in March 2010, was the internal newsletter (*Appendix C*). Because the part-time communications assistant was the chair of the newsletter committee, the Office of Communications was able to oversee the publication and ensure its quality without incurring the burden of writing it. The resulting newsletter was attractive and well-received as evidenced by survey results (*Appendix D*), indicating that 97 percent of readers learned more about the school.
- The individual who wrote the accounting newsletter initially was concerned when she saw the new template in April 2010 for fear that she would not be able to use the technology. When we demonstrated that the template was just a Word document, she was very pleased with its ease of use and now routinely produces newsletters (*Appendix E*) that inform, educate and advance both the school and department missions, all in a quality design consistent with the school's brand. In addition, the predominant color chosen was the same color used on the Accounting section of the School's website, adding additional continuity for the both Accounting Department and the school.
- The LeaderCORE template (*Appendix F*) was designed to be consistent with the school's brand and the newly developed LeaderCORE sub-brand, using the images and red reserved for that program but retaining all the iconography of the school. This enables the Graduate Programs Office to provide program updates to current and prospective students, coaches and employers in a quality format that helps to brand the new program strengthened by the school's identity.
- The general School of Management template (*Appendix G*) is used for individual school-wide projects as needed. Users can now produce materials that instantly comply with the school's brand at no additional cost. Photos in the header of the general newsletter template were chosen to complement the school's theme's of excellence: real-world learning, community and economic impact and global perspective. UB's primary blue was used as this is an overall school-wide template to match the general website. Departments enthusiastically embraced this new tool.
- By using the school's logo, colors, globe icon, fonts and tagline (Global positioning for a world of business), all the templates are attractive and consistent, and enhance the school's image and brand (see *Appendix H* for screen shot of school's website for sample of school's image).
- An editorial style guide that was designed for the school's Web authors outlining the most frequently used principals (*Appendix I*) was adapted for all authors and posted on the Internal Resources section of the school's website to ensure editorial style consistency.

Overall, this creative tactic allowed the Communications Office to advance the school's mission and better serve its internal customers while using minimal resources.