Why does brand strength matter?

How strong is your brand?

Our task in the next 60 minutes:

We need a framework to understand brand to help us take efficient action

1. Awareness

2. Relevance

3. Preference

4. So what?
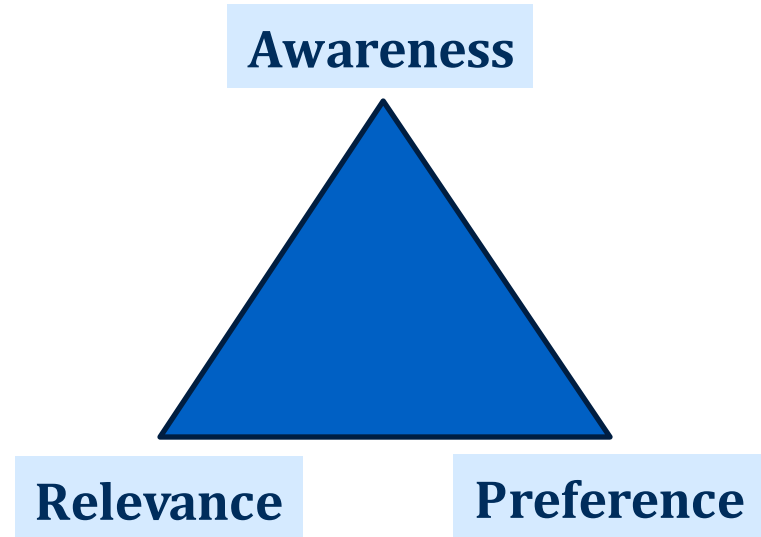
1

Awareness

Are you known within your market?

Do you have a clearly defined market?

Who is (and is not) your student?

- **By demographic factors**
  - Geographic (Distance, urbanicity)
  - Income
  - Ethnicity

- **By motive / niche**
  - Faith affiliation
  - Specialty focus or interest domain (Architecture school, Business school, medical school)
  - Interest in specialty experiences (Military colleges, HBCU, Hispanic-serving)

Does your institution have name recognition?

Students won't enroll at institutions they have never heard of

- What are your inquiry sources?
- Do you monitor your website traffic?
  - A campus name is frequently the #1 search phrase used to find an institution
  - What are the top entry pages on your website?
- How do you manage word-of-mouth advertising?
  - Legacy
  - Network development
  - Delivery of quality experiences (with feedback)
- Engagement with high school students
  - Summer camps
  - Dual-enrollment programs
  - Visits / conferences

Aided
-vs-
Unaided

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Positioning: What do you represent?

More than a logo, brands must fill a need and connect emotionally

What do you associate with:

Your institution here!

> The customer never buys a product. By definition the customer buys the satisfaction of a want. He buys value.
> - *Peter F. Drucker, 1973*

Location

Leverage the competitive advantages of location

- What are the unique industries in the region where your institution is located?
  - Do you have relationships with the major institutions/industry players within your region?
  - What are the workforce and labor demands? What skills are needed?
  - What do employers think of your graduates?
  - Do you tune curricular offerings to meet regional/local demand?
- Location is so much more than geography
  - Maximize use of psychological distance to overcome too-close / too-far objections

The presence of clusters suggests that much of competitive advantage lies outside a given company…residing instead in the locations of its business units.
Michael E. Porter, 1985

Leverage brand architecture concepts

Brand architecture clarifies who you are and why that matters <u>to the student</u>

- *Mission:* The reason for a firm's existence.
- *Vision:* A statement of how the customer's world will be better because of the completion of mission; a preferred future.
- *Values:* A few relevant principles by which guide decision-making and define what is 'right' and 'wrong' from the perspective of the firm.
- *Positioning:* Attributes that are relevant, differentiating and "able to be owned" by the firm relative to competition in the eyes of a potential customer; what are you known for?
- *Personality:* Words that set the tone/voice with which a firm 'speaks'. If the firm were a person, what are 2-3 words/phrases we might use to describe him/her.
- *Tone:* The voice with which communications should be speaking with:
- *Audience Characteristics:* Short descriptions of our (prospective) students (characteristics, attitudes, motivating factors) that impact offering design and outreach strategies.
- *Logo:* Visual symbol to represent the brand
- *Tagline:* A short statement to summarize the feeling the brand delivers

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Awareness: Measures and actions

Metric	Actions
Website hits	Search engine optimization
Inquiries (esp. Unaided)	Inquiry forms on website with progressive elaboration
Inquiries/Source Code	Track source codes (and spends) to see which campaigns stimulate the most
Inquiries (Aided)	Social media strategies to stimulate interest
Inquiries (Aided)	Paid search and digital media advertising based on geographic and industry interest profiles.
Inquiries (Aided)	Search campaigns
Stranger test (Qualitative assessment)	*In places where your market gathers* (conferences, public gatherings, churches for faith-based institutions, etc.) when you mention your institution, what percentage of the time does your conversation partner respond: "I have never heard of you!"

Does your value proposition connect with your market's felt needs?

What is important when looking at college?

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES WHO SAID THESE TOPICS WERE IMPORTANT TO THEM

Element	% Important	% Accessed
Academics (programs, majors, minors, etc.)	99%	91%
Admission requirements	98%	87%
The strength of the academic programs (ratings, rankings, etc.)	97%	80%
The cost (tuition, fees, room, board, etc.)	97%	80%
Housing	96%	64%
Application process and timeline	95%	84%
Community life and activities	95%	74%
Safety precautions	95%	50%
Financial aid and scholarships	94%	81%
The location (town, area, local spots, etc.)	94%	74%
Food services and dining	93%	54%
What makes the institution different	92%	74%
Account services and paying the tuition bill	91%	42%
Options to finance college education (financial aid, loans, etc.)	86%	64%
Diversity and other demographics	73%	63%

Signal screening criteria, emphasize differentiating factors

Don't dwell in the screening criteria; differentiate!

- **Screening criteria (Hygiene factors) get you into the game**
  - Must-have's (Non-compensatory)
  - Used to shorten a wide-field of competitors to a narrower list
  - Make these criteria EASY to see

- **But you WIN the game with differentiating factors**
  - Greater willingness to make trade-off's (Compensatory logic)
    - Having X (or more of it) can make up for not having Y (or less of it)
  - Used to make the final selection
  - Emphasize scope, breadth and depth

What is differentiation, _really_?

- **Relevance**
  - Is there demand from interested **_students_**?
  - Is there demand from **_employers_** for students with **_skills_** this program will provide?
  - Will someone **_pay_** for it?
- **Differentiation**
  - Differentiation **_by degree_**
    - Qualitatively better in some dimension
    - Geography
  - Differentiation **_by type_**
    - Elements of the student experience
    - Forms of delivery
    - Etc.
- **Authenticity**
  - Track **_record of success;_** _demonstrable outcomes_
  - **_Commitment of resources_** for ongoing success
  - **_Passion_** of faculty and staff

MARKET DEMAND: What students and employers want = Relevance

COMPETITION: Unoccupied market positions = Differentiation

PROGRAM: What we do well = Authenticity

All in the context of your market
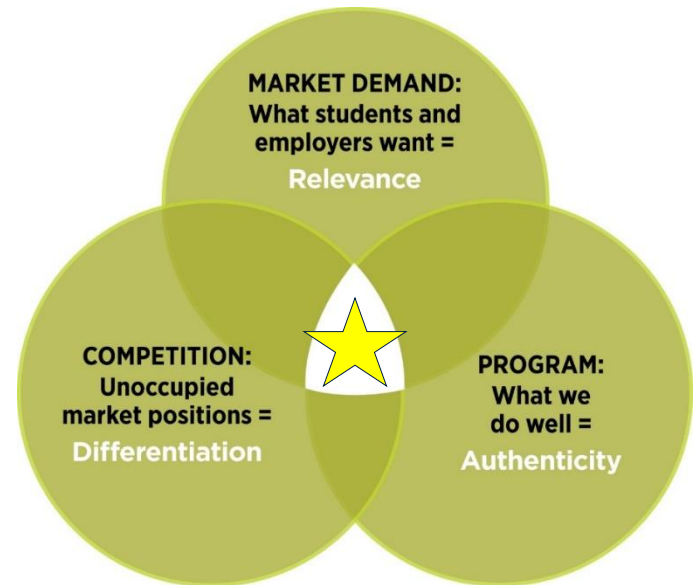
Do they know what you offer?

Offer *benefits*, not features

Feature		Benefit
Small class size	▶	A place where you are known and encouraged to thrive
Many majors	▶	Ability to explore fields of study that interest you and expand your future opportunities
Internships and opportunities for hands-on learning	▶	You are applying what you learn to work and building real-world experience with [large name brand company] in [xyz field]. Graduate from [our institution] not only with a degree, but with a resume and connections to earn more out-of-the-gate.
Study-abroad opportunities	▶	Don't just learn business, come to our XYZ trip to China where you will start to build your international network. Understand how those on other countries with different laws can apply business principles to expand your ability to imagine options to make businesses thrive.
Variety of sports	▶	Build friends for life playing the sports you enjoy. Meet the friends you will study with and laugh with while you are here.

Segment to value!

Well-designed segmentation schemes:

- **Represent distinct value propositions** by appealing to different buying motives.

- **Extend recruitment reach** by demonstrating deeper level of relevance to distinct populations. Overcome the "Myth of the middle".

- Include a **distinct** offering/services, to distinct populations, through a distinct communications flows.

- **Balance simplicity with comprehensiveness.** More segments are better to the extent they are mutually exclusive, extend reach and can be executed well.

Myth of the middle			
	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3
Offering 1	9	5	1
Offering 2	8	5	1
Offering 3	1	5	8
Offering 4	1	5	9
Average	4.75	5	4.75

The 'jobs' question

Build the value-chain for all majors

What Employable skills will I get?

Am I getting employable skills as a student?

Did I get employable skills?

- Offering majors with clear employment outcomes
- Demonstrate alumni outcomes for majors for prospective students

- Cultivation of alumni networks in fields of interest
- Opportunities to earn sought-after skills certificates related to field of study
- List employable skills in syllabi.

- Teach students to include skills in their resumes with career services
- Identify major employers for employer advisory
- Identify occupations with gaps related to majors
- Identify skills employers seeks and insert into curriculum (as pedagogically appropriate)
- Design programs to build employment pipelines

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NACE

DQP DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE

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Relevance: Measures and actions

Being different is relative

Metric*	Actions
Bounce rate	Design search-optimized web content around topics that interest your prospective students.
Pages per visit	Design search-optimized web content around topics that interest your prospective student segments.
Application Rate	Ensure application form is easy to find and high value offerings (e.g., majors, sports, etc.) are mentioned.
SM Engagement	Create SM channels that create content centered on topics of interest by segment. Ensure channels are staffed to deliver content regularly.
Visits	Encourage students to visit campus. Design visit experiences recognizing differences between segments (e.g., different days, difference agendas within the same day, use of break-outs).
Student Program Satisfaction	Ensure students understand how course-work has real-world application. Help students document what skills and experiences they have acquired for use on résumés.
Hands-on learning participation rates	Track the percentage of students with hands-on learning opportunities (e.g., internships, help with faculty research, performances, etc.). Create and encourage students to apply what they learn and build networks.

* Track metrics by segment where-ever possible

Relevance: Measures and actions

Some qualitative assessments:

- Do you hear faculty and admissions team members vocalize frustration that prospective students just don't get what makes your institution so valuable?
- Do prospective students get excited during visit days when you discuss your distinctives? Is there energy and excitement or boredom in their eyes?
- Do current students complain they see their education as book-learning/irrelevant?
- Are faculty able to actively contribute in their field of study? Are faculty engaged in communities of practice?
- Is the institution aware of its differentiating features *and investing* in them?
- Are you generating _unaided_ leads interested in the fields you offer? Or are there many requests for programs you do not offer?
- Do you review your academic portfolio and make adjustments (Adding new in-demand programs / divesting in programs with low and declining demand)?
- Do families argue they can get the same education elsewhere, so their decision is really just about price?
- Do local employers seek your graduates?

3

Preference

Are you the
best option?

Deliver the goods!

Stop talking about getting outcomes…SHOW THEM!

- This is a **whole-institution** initiative, not just marketing/recruitment
- Invest in 'getting the data'
  - Collect data via surveys, social media search, and work with external entities to maximize 'knowledge rate'
  - Distribute the data for marketing, recruitment, academic reviews, accreditation, advancement needs
- Frame the hard data with stories of success
  - Narratives of alumni who faced hardship, made substantial investments, and now are achieving remarkable success
  - Narratives of alumni with extremely high levels of success (major accolades)
  - Narratives of alumni who represent the heart of the brand
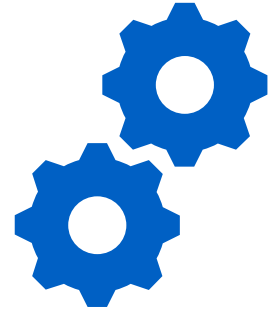
Get the word out

- Include outcomes data and narratives in promotional materials/advertising
- Develop influence-the-influencer strategies
- Build an employer advisory council to offer round-trip feedback on curriculum
- Invest in infrastructure to improve curricular offerings and lab experiences
- Give faculty time/space to engage in published research; include students when possible
- Present at relevant trade conferences/shows by discipline
- Make faculty available to media for commentary on current events
- Invest in co-curricular experiences, especially those that contribute directly to brand distinctives

Value-engineering

We need to understand preference deeply:

Within market my institution's market given competitors my leads consider for the differentiating quality attributes am I the best?

? Relative to competitors are my offerings really the best? Or do **strategic investments** need to be made?

? If my offerings are the best, are we **effectively communicating** the benefits/value?

? We need to invest in **both** offerings and communications

The rankings question

- Rankings (US News, Forbes, etc.) can be used effectively as third-party validation of quality
- For some markets, rankings used as a screen
    - Elite students looking for top programs
    - Graduate programs (Law, medicine, engineering, etc.)
- For most students/parents in our surveys, rankings are <u>low</u> in importance.
- Wide variety of rankings employ sub-scores largely outside your direct control; but that will be influenced by strong outcomes.
- Generally, we recommend:
    - Invest more on delivering the goods and broadly communicating your value to your market and influencers
    - Avoid over-investment in campaigns intended to influence rankings
    - Support IR in submitting accurate information to rankings *relevant* to your brand and basis of differentiation.

Preference: Measures and actions

Are you delivering the goods?

Metric*	Actions
Market Share	Relative to top competitors in our market, what % of first-year enrolled does your institution represent? We want to work to increase this to understand if we are winning on preference.
4-year graduation rate	Most families expect graduation in four years (despite reality). Ensure all students know what is expected to graduate in 4 years and eliminate barriers to this goal.
Employment (1,5,10 years)	For some students, employment after college is the goal. Help students build resume and job search plans as well as graduate on time. Build relationships with major employers and learn what curricular distinctives / internship opportunities help.
Graduate School Acceptance	For some students, acceptance into graduate school is the next step. Track graduate school acceptance rates by field. Build relationships with graduate schools and learn what curricular distinctives help.
Net Promoter Score	Are students, faculty, and alumni willing to recommend your institution to future students? Learn why/why not and promote strengths while aggressively addressing concerns.
No. Speaking requests	Make experts of the university available to local/niche associations
Referrals	Create referral pages. Build referral programs with scholarships attributed to membership in a partner organization/network.
Yield	Faculty outreach to admitted students
Student ratings	When asked, do prospective students report you are their first-choice institution?

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* Track metrics by segment where-ever possible
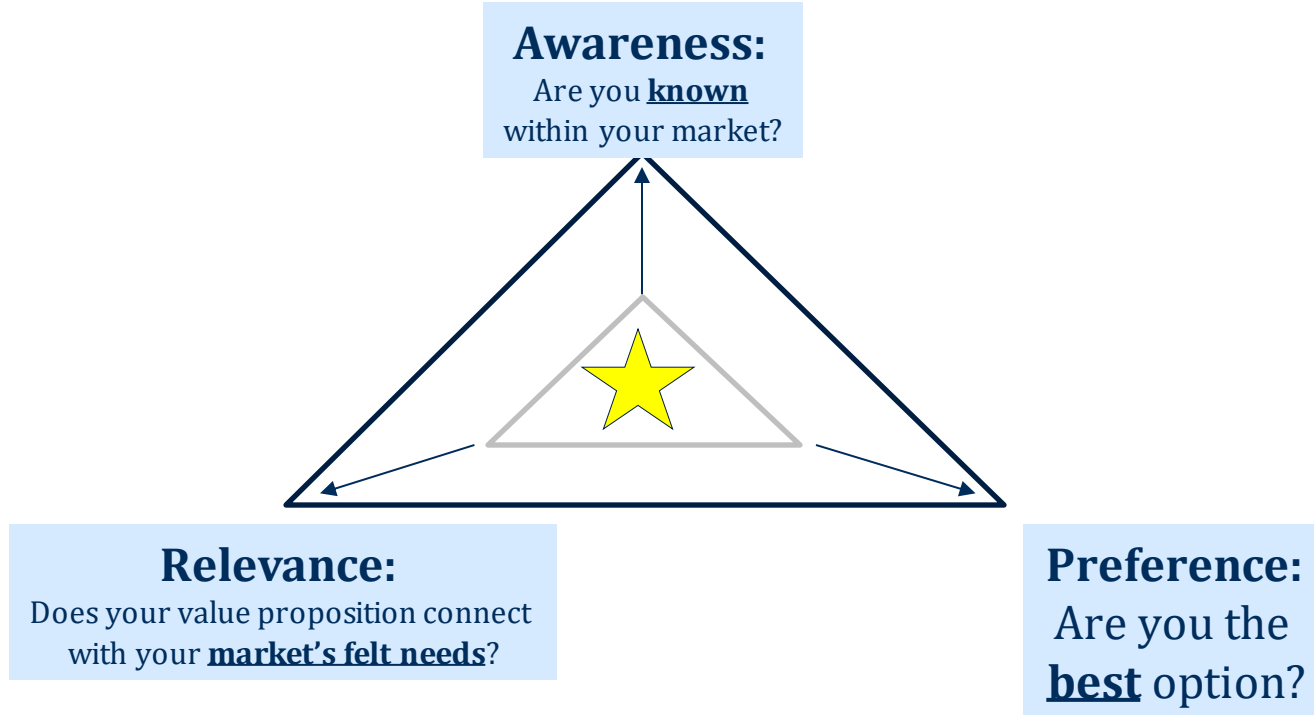
Preference: Measures and actions

Some qualitative assessments:

- When you talk to alumni, would they enroll their son/daughter?   Why or why not?

- When you tell strangers that you work for your institution, are they excited to meet you and talk about what your institution is about? Do they inherently have a sense your institution is a leader?

- Are members of the community invited into discussions *by the outside community* (e.g., speaking engagements, requests for concerts, interview requests by media)?

- When recruitment representatives say they are from your institution, do prospective students duck the call or take the call?

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THE BIG TAKE-AWAY:

Awareness:
Are you **known**
within your market?

Relevance:
Does your value proposition connect
with your **market's felt needs**?

Preference:
Are you the
best option?

Conduct brand research every 3 to 5 years

Research will help focus brand development and recruitment communications opportunities

- Goals of research
    - Identify how field of competition is changing
    - Assess the 3 dimensions of brand
    - Refine expectations for positioning and message
- Suggested elements to include:
    - Quantitative:
        - Analysis of competition
        - Surveys
        - Student Satisfaction
    - Qualitative
        - Focus groups / Interviews
        - Website / SEO Review
        - Secret Shopper

Build a brand-tracker

Develop KPI's and PI's to assess brand health

- Build a dashboard that is regularly updated with metrics pertaining to each element of brand health.
- Ensure elements can be filtered/reported on by segments
- Provide clear definitions of metrics and why each are used.
- Provide benchmark and historic data to contextualize current value when possible
- If working with IT to build, work with them to understand *deeply* the meaning of each metric
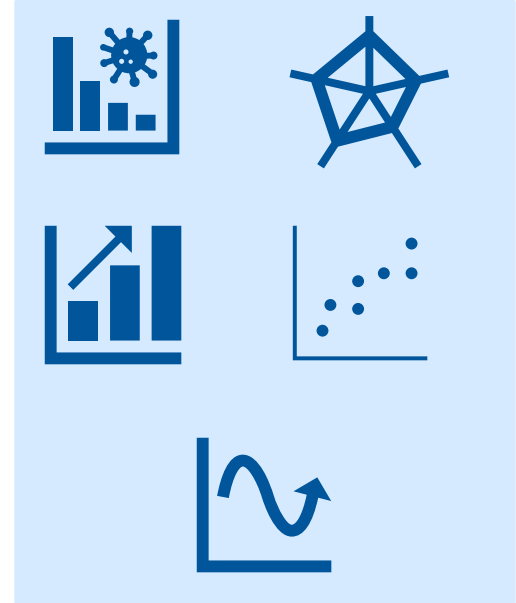
Take <u>targeted</u> action

Use hurdle rates to prioritize initiatives that will have material impact

- Based on analysis from research and brand-tracker
    - Identify where opportunities for improvement exist
    - Define strategies to improve performance on KPI's (and culture)
    - Build the business case for each strategy/initiative
    - Identify hurdle-rates to ensure initiatives are worth pursuing
        - Examples:
            - 5% increase or more in net enrolled
            - 5% or more in net revenue
            - 10% or more in savings
    - Concepts become strategies when they are:
        - Defined with specific goals and timeline
        - Staffed
        - Funded

Thank you for your time!

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