Howard University

Synopsis
Howard University is a private, non-sectarian university in Washington, D.C., founded in 1867 to provide educational opportunities to qualified people who were denied acceptance at many universities of that time, including women and African-Americans. Today, Howard is widely considered to be one of the most prestigious historically black institutions of higher education in the world. It offers, in addition to undergraduate studies, graduate programs in business, law, pharmacy, social work, medicine, dentistry, and divinity.

In 2013, Howard enlisted the Channel team to evaluate its positioning and brand strategy, and offer recommendations for further strengthening its standing as a leading research institution and university of choice for highly qualified students. TDC conducted an extensive series of interviews and focus groups with administrators, faculty, deans, alumni, donors, current and past presidents, and students to gather information and insights.

In addition, Channel performed a communications audit to assess the effectiveness of Howard’s current marketing materials, as well as a brand benchmarking study to understand how Howard’s peer and competitive institutions market themselves. The body of knowledge gathered was then applied by Channel to establish a new brand positioning, messaging platform, and look and feel for Howard’s brand strategy going forward.

Our Process
We applied our Channel BrandBuilder™ methodology for developing recommendations on repositioning and re-energizing the Howard University brand. It enabled us to discover Howard’s unique attributes and gain insights into Howard’s brand equity, culture, and values. It was also applied to synthesize those key findings into a brand promise and positioning, develop a consistent and clear messaging platform, and establish a branding theme.

Results
Our findings and recommendations were well-received by stakeholders at Howard. We have prepared recommendations for the next phases of the new brand implementation. Our next objective will be to build and elevate consensus of the Howard brand internally with faculty and staff, and externally in the minds of prospective students, parents, guidance counselors, alumni, and the broader Howard community.
Channel BrandBuilder™

Channel BrandBuilder™ is our proprietary approach for building an organization's brand, re-energizing a brand, or developing a major campaign. It's a flexible, seven-step process. The discovery phase is the foundation of our process with modes of discovery that include internal and external surveys, focus groups, interviews with key stakeholders, interviews with external audiences, competitive brand benchmarking research, an audit of existing communications, and ethnographic research.
Interviews and Focus Groups Questionnaire

Gathering insights and perceptions of audiences and stakeholders is a critical step in developing a brand’s foundation. We conducted phone and in-person interviews, as well as focus groups, with many representatives of the Howard University community, from students and faculty to alumni and donors, and even current and past presidents.
Our Brand Benchmarking study evaluated the online and printed marketing materials of 34 universities identified as Howard’s peer and competitive institutions. It examined the positioning, key messaging, and brand look and feel of institutions across the country, including historically black colleges and universities, large public universities, prestigious private institutions, as well as universities in the metro Washington, DC area.
Communications Audit

To get a better understanding of the manner in which Howard had engaged its audiences to date, we conducted an audit of much of its available marketing materials. We examined messaging, brand consistency, adherence to brand standards, use and quality of images, and many other aspects of the materials in order make informed recommendations going forward.
Key Findings

After analyzing the information gathered from our interviews and focus groups, we identified major takeaways that revealed the most compelling perceptions and truths about the Howard experience.
All about a transformational experience

Howard University is the nation’s leading HBCU and foremost center of black academia in the world. Its Washington, D.C. location, comprehensive academic programs and service-driven mission prepare students to succeed in their careers, overcome barriers and change the world in a positive way. The university’s legacy of distinguished alumni, combined with its accomplished faculty, current achievements and research focus, propels Howard forward.

Positioning Statement

Our key findings led us to a positioning statement for Howard that defined its competitive arena, its audience, its points of differentiation, and ultimately, its unique selling proposition (USP).
## Message Platform

Our Message Platform mapped out important qualities of Howard that helped inform our Positioning Statement. It identified elements that illustrate Howard’s character, core values, differentiators, and benefits, and provided a reference tool for shaping Howard’s messaging in the future.
One of the concepts we developed was based on Howard’s illustrious history of producing trailblazers and pioneers in many fields. The “Start Here” message invited prospective students to continue the tradition of breaking new ground and changing the world at Howard as well.
Creative Concept: “Like Nowhere Else”

This concept highlighted the unique learning opportunities and environments that Howard University provides its students. Its “classrooms” and academic experiences range far beyond the Howard campus and often include the halls of government as well as communities in countries around the world.