The Business of Branding 2011

An international report on branding, marketing and business school perceptions, drawing on the views of current students, alumni, faculty and administrative staff.

August 2011 :: Andrew Crisp, Sarah Hardcastle

carringtoncrisp

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Introduction

The Business of Branding study was first run in 2004. Since that time more than 100 business schools have taken part in the study from 25 countries. Nearly 70,000 respondents have completed the study, providing a wealth of data for business schools considering how best to position themselves and enhance their marketing effectiveness.

Research was conducted by CarringtonCrisp in partnership with the Association of Business Schools (ABS), EFMD, the Global Business Schools Network (GBSN), Consejo Latinoamericano de Escuelas de Administracion (CLADEA) and the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans (CFBSD) during March/April/May 2011 using an online questionnaire. In addition, specialist support was provided by Giselle Weybrecht for the section on Sustainability.

**Figure 1.** Reasons given for indicating that a school has a strong reputation
Data collected over six weeks during March, April and May 2011 generated a total of 8,011 responses. The response was drawn from business schools in eight countries. Respondents were drawn from 125 nationalities. Thirteen nations had more than 1% of the total response, but the largest responses were drawn from Australian, German, British, Nigerian, South African, Swiss and French nationals. First degree students (1,903) and alumni (1,576) were the largest respondent groups in this year’s study. Across the sample respondents were split almost 55:45 male to female.

The following summary is based on the key findings from this year's study.

**Careers are key before, during and after**

Before choosing where to study many students consider the likely impact of their choice on their future career prospects. While they are studying, students are increasingly looking for help finding a placement, sensing that experience will be as valuable on their CVs as will their degree. An increasingly valuable career service noted by many of the respondent student groups was having ‘student CV’s on a secure website that can be searched by employers’.

**Figure 2. Ways of assessing value for money**
Post-graduation alumni are looking to their school to help with their career development through advice, networks and even sourcing opportunities. As more schools look to enhance alumni fundraising, provision of alumni career services may produce greater financial support.

**Brand, price and reputation**

In the 2011 study almost 65% of all respondents state that they believe ‘My school has a strong clear brand which is widely recognised and understood’; historically this figure has been closer to 55%. The best performing schools tend to have positive brand recognition at around 75%.

Stronger brands often mean higher prices. In the UK market place with the significant increase in undergraduate fees planned for 2012, brand may become more important than ever. However, there is something of a chicken and egg relationship – will higher fees lead to stronger brands or will brands have to strengthen to ensure that higher fees are sustainable?

Track record and career enhancement are reflected in the key drivers of reputation in this year’s study. Whether it’s rankings, accreditation or perception of quality, all are identified as having a significant impact on reputation. Add in an ability to enhance career prospects and flexibility for part-time students and you have all the elements of reputation to drive a strong brand.
**Does cost count?**

Higher fees will undoubtedly have a negative impact on decisions to study, however what is meant by ‘higher’ will change from student to student. Students when confronted with actual numbers and different payment terms may have a different opinion as to whether they would or would not go to business school/university. When it comes to money, choices are about more than just fees.

Cost of living, especially when compared between countries, can make a difference in where a student decides to study. However, students are prepared to pay more if they feel they have a better chance to get a more highly paid job on graduation or receive better support in finding employment. Cost perceptions also vary significantly between institutions.

For those schools with a negative cost-quality differential, suggesting poor value for money, the task is significant – how to improve perceptions of value when it is almost impossible to reduce costs for students.

When judging value for money students have become increasingly sophisticated. All audience groups highlighted two considerations when assessing value for money:

- The likelihood of achieving the career outcome that I desire
- The cost of my preferred course measured against the cost of courses at other schools

Another strong consideration when evaluating value for money chosen by many respondents was:

- I assess against my perception of the reputation of the school

The importance attached to this consideration ties in with the growing role of brand described elsewhere in this summary.

**Where on the web should we be?**

The Internet in general and the university/business school website have the greatest impact on decisions about what and where to study. However, having a website and being online is not enough. Just as it used to be key to advertise in publications with the best audience coverage, so it is now important to use the right Internet tools. Blogs have some impact, but it’s reasonably limited, some websites of third-party media can be useful with particular audiences, but social networks are the coming force.
Newspapers have been in decline since the start of the survey seven years ago, although in some specific local markets newspapers still have a role to play in maintaining brand awareness or promoting new activities through both PR and advertising. Newspapers may also have a particular role in maintaining awareness and influence among parents, and have greater impact in their online versions. Similarly, fairs and exhibitions are beginning to move online and have an impact in cyberspace.

Despite the growing use of social networking sites, there are still questions about their current impact in education marketing. A separate CarringtonCrisp study showed over 80% of students using social media sites at least once a day, although rarely in connection with business schools. The same study also showed that there was growing use of social media sites among prospective students seeking an authentic voice from alumni and current students at their chosen business schools.

**Figure 4.** Ways in which I expect a business school to demonstrate its approach to sustainability
Sustainability – it’s important, but does it matter?

Large numbers of students believe that sustainability is important for their business education, but similar numbers didn't consider it when deciding what and where to study. More than 60% of all audience groups said that 'I didn't look for information on sustainability when choosing my business degree'. The data seems to say that promoting sustainability credentials is unlikely to have an impact on attraction and recruitment of students.

There is an expectation that sustainability will be demonstrated through the content of programmes rather than school operations. More than 1 in 4 also said they expected sustainability to be demonstrated 'by running projects involved in giving back to local, national or international organisations and communities', 'by reducing a school's carbon footprint' and 'by encouraging recycling on campus'. Up to 70% of some audience groups felt that sustainability was presented as an add on, as a save the world approach, had too few opportunities to learn about it or was not included at all in their studies.

Figure 5. Methods of accessing fellow alumni
What price the alumni relationship?

Keeping in touch with alumni should be getting easier. Social networks and e-communication make it easier to reach alumni wherever they maybe. However, dedicated websites for alumni have little or no use according to nearly 40% of respondents and 30% keep in touch with fellow alumni through social networks rather than school systems. Some of the contact may be through school run pages on social networks, but there are many groups where a school is not formally involved.

Effective alumni relations mean adding value whether it’s in the experience or the communications. Electronic newsletters are the most popular benefit received by alumni. Commercial discounts were the least valued benefit.

Success also requires good internal communications, making sure that staff understand the benefit of investment in alumni relations, but more than a third of faculty are unclear about the purpose of alumni relations at their school.
Fundraising appears to be a growing strand of alumni relations at many business schools outside the US, where it has long been a feature. Less than a quarter of alumni in the study said that there were no circumstances under which they would consider a financial appeal. The two reasons that were most likely to motivate support for a financial appeal, selected by more than 40% of the sample were, if it reduced a personal tax bill or when individual income reached a certain level. Only 15% were likely to support fundraising for a new building programme, while almost double that number would give to an appeal to ensure continuing and wider access for future students.

**It’s not just career**

More than 70% of all audience groups say they would always or in most cases recommend their business school to prospective students and it's not just because they've got a good job at the end of their studies. Of course, career counts, but it's also about academic standards and challenging teaching staff.

Fewer than 10% of all audience groups across this year's study say that it is unlikely or that they would not recommend their business school to prospective students. The two main reasons for not recommending were:

- Course expectations were not met
- The quality of teaching was poor

Branding, whether within a university or as a stand alone business school, is set to become ever more important as fees rise and international competition intensifies. Understanding what lies behind a reputation and perceptions of competitors will be key to continued success. Whether it's cost, career outcomes, historic reputation or academic standards, knowing what matters to students and others involved in decision making will offer opportunities to enhance marketing effectiveness and value for money in marketing spend.
The Business of Branding can tell you:

- How your business school is perceived?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses, and those of your key competitors?
- What marketing activity has the greatest impact?
- Where to get the best return from your marketing spend?
- How to improve your career services?
- How to strengthen your alumni relations?
- What role sustainability should play in your offer, curriculum and operations? and
- How to grow the reputation of your programmes and stand out in a crowded and competitive market?

Each participating school receives a global report and a personalised report on the strengths and weaknesses of their business school and up to five competitors, as well as an on-campus presentation with a detailed discussion of the survey results. Data is broken down by the different staff, student and alumni groups responding.

The Business of Branding gives you the data to see how you can better promote your business school to prospective students, improve marketing effectiveness and drive greater value for money from your marketing budget.

To take part in the next Business of Branding study in March 2012, contact us at info@carringtoncrisp.com or complete the booking form below. Reports will be available for participating schools in June 2012.

**Schools booking before 1 January 2012 get a £500/€575 discount on the usual price of £3000/€3450.**

Schools can add up to five questions specific to those responding from their own school for a further £500/€575.

All prices are exclusive of VAT, which, where required, will be added at the applicable rate.

Name and address of Business School:

Project Coordinator: 

Title: 

Telephone Number: 

Email Address: 

*Please accept this completed application form and a cheque or send me an invoice for the amount shown above.*

Signature of Lead Contact 

Date 

Please send your completed booking form to: CarringtonCrisp Ltd, 34 Ladbroke Square, London, W11 3NB, UK or fax to +44 (0) 20 7229 9310. For queries, please contact CarringtonCrisp on +44 (0) 20 7229 7373 or by email at info@carringtoncrisp.com