

2017 Big Apple submission
#2B REPUTATION/BRAND MANAGEMENT: Nonprofit Organizations
NYIT: The Future Is Ours

RESEARCH

New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) has transformed dramatically in 60 years from being a local “vocational” school to a highly ranked global university offering 90+ degrees, including medical degrees—yet we are largely unknown or misunderstood. We are a university with compelling stories of student, faculty, and alumni achievements, but we needed to find new and innovative ways to share those stories and engage our audiences.

To set a baseline measurement of awareness of the NYIT brand, we conducted a brand perception study that included prospective students, parents of prospective students, and faculty and staff at peer institutions. The results confirmed that an alarmingly large percentage of our key publics didn’t recognize that we were a university; didn’t understand the breadth of what we taught; didn’t know we had multiple global campuses; and were unaware of the distinctive benefits that make us stand out in a sea of other choices. The study also showed that audiences who learned our key messages found them appealing; that the best opportunity for NYIT to strengthen its competitive position was to tout program-specific excellence. We seized that opportunity.

PLANNING

Our ultimate objective: build awareness and reputation to aid in increasing applications and deposits of first year students. Secondly, we wanted to build awareness and reputation among influencers in our fields of expertise; alumni; potential employers of our graduates; and faculty and staff in our peer institutions in higher education, whose opinions affect our rankings and our ability to attract top talent.

Knowing that our primary audience of prospective students was composed of digital natives with a historically low attention span, we had to devise solutions beyond traditional public relations. The tactics had to be integrated and seamless. Messages had to be compelling, but also easily accessed and absorbed.

The Communications and Marketing staff led focus groups and met with colleagues, faculty, and students to identify NYIT’s strongest attributes and most compelling stories. We drilled down from general subject areas that are standard at many universities and got “micro” on our stories.

Our strategy was to pick six topics/subject areas of exceptional strength at NYIT, and tell stories that showcased our expertise in those areas from multiple angles and with many voices. Instead of saying that NYIT teaches engineering, we drilled down to cybersecurity. Instead of saying that NYIT has a med school, we drilled down to how we address the need for greater primary care in underserved communities. And so on. Authenticity was key, as was humor, where appropriate.

Unifying and forming a rallying cry for our efforts, was our new, trademarked tagline: “THE FUTURE IS OURS.” Focusing on our strengths, our campaign highlights people who are coding, designing, prototyping, diagnosing, and shaping the future of humanity.

EXECUTION

Op-eds and faculty expertise – To build reputation and generate awareness before a wide range of audiences, we embarked on an aggressive campaign to place op-eds and have university experts quoted in prominent national media.

Website – NYIT’s former website was difficult to navigate, static, and dated. Our goal was to simplify navigation and focus on prospective students, rather than try to be a catch-all resource for all audiences. Using a mobile-first strategy, we let bold imagery, animations, illustrations, and videos do much of the talking. We showcased our six featured degree programs on the homepage and reinforced our new theme of “The Future Is Ours.”

Videos – Because video content is king among our target demographics, NYIT worked with its ad agency and two film production companies to develop two promotional video suites. The first features students telling their stories in their own words and aims to help prospective students answer the question, “Will I fit in at NYIT?”

The second, shot in a widescreen format for a cinematic effect, focuses on experiential learning and groundbreaking, human-centered research at NYIT.

Global recognition – Third-party endorsements, especially prestigious national and international industry awards, result in elevated reputation among peers and external audiences. We sought awards as a way to elevate NYIT's reputation (and external awareness of its pioneering global university model).

Ad campaign – Most universities advertise their school with scenic pictures of their quad, or happy, multi-cultural kids throwing a Frisbee. We broke out of category-generic advertising and uplifted our reputation by showcasing the university's reputation-building attributes: NYIT students, faculty and alumni who all embrace the power of technology in the 21st century. For the campaign launch, we concentrated on out of home (OOH) advertising near our two NY campuses, digital video marketing, paid social media activations, and print advertising targeting thought leaders.

Social media – We leveraged social media as a storytelling platform, using assets developed in both print and video for our branding and reputation building campaign. By tailoring the campaign to Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, and Facebook, we reached a wider audience, while building brand affinity and generating viral growth. The hashtag #TheFutureIsOurs further branded the campaign among current students, prospective students, faculty, staff, and influencers.

EVALUATION

Domestic applications rose by 13% and deposits rose by 1%. First year applications of domestic and international students combined rose by 17%, bringing us well over 10,000 applications, the highest we have ever seen.

Op-eds and faculty expertise – In 2016, we placed opinion content by NYIT authors in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek.com*, *Washington Post* *Grade Point Blog*, *Forbes.com*, *CNBC*, and many others. Faculty and staff experts were quoted (or had research featured by) *Good Morning America*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Street*, *CIO*, *Huffington Post*, *CNN.com*, *The New York Times*, *US News & World Report*, *WebMD*, and many more.

Website/Videos – The revamped website resulted in a 17% increase in volume. Average duration on site increased from 4 minutes per visit to over 6 minutes following an expansion of video offerings in July 2016. SEO improved dramatically, with 33% of visitors reaching the nyit.edu site through search engine referrals.

Global recognition – NYIT was named one of three universities to win the 2016 Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization from NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Resulting media coverage, “bragging rights” in our own internal and external communications, and the overall recognition served to inform the uninitiated and instill pride in the NYIT community.

Ad campaign – NYIT created a domination effect in NYC by purchasing ads on bus shelters and newsstand kiosks surrounding our Columbus Circle campus. A 30-second anthem video, geo-targeted to NYIT's two New York campuses, introduced the new brand theme and the tagline “The Future Is Ours.” 817,000 impressions of NYIT's 30-second anthem video were served to all device types. More than half a million people watched the full video.

Social media – NYIT capitalized on the ads and video assets created for “The Future Is Ours” campaign within social media. The 30-second anthem video was posted to its Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram accounts generating more than 2,000 organic views and nearly 25,000 impressions. The post also saw a spike in school pride generating 340 positive engagements for the university. Additionally, NYIT posted the OOH ads to its Instagram account. Students were encouraged to tag a friend who embodied the value demonstrated in the ad. The response was overwhelmingly positive. More than 400 students participated.