

## Marketing: The Cool Way to Do Powerful Fraternal Education

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I've been secretly tricking your students these last couple years. Sorry.

Here's my confession. Your student leaders thought I was providing this sexy marketing education and strategy. They've eaten it up. They've been all like, "Marketing is cool! We love this stuff. It's so much better than that values education, strategic planning, leadership seminars, or painful risk management stuff we normally have to learn."

Ha. Suckers.

See, I've secretly been helping your student leaders, whether through campus visits or at big industry conferences, think about being a fraternity/sorority leader in a whole different way. I've been helping them reimagine methods for reducing risk in their chapters. I've been helping them define, talk about, and emotionally express their organization's values – and be excited to do so. And the entire time they thought I was talking about marketing.

Here's the thing. You can trick them too. Just try it. It feels great. You'll get hooked on it. It's so naughty, but feels so dang good.

Listen, as a long-time educator in this industry, since the turn of the century, I never thought I'd feel proud about teaching fraternity/sorority leaders *marketing*. No. Marketing always felt like something too business-y, too slimy, too-not-values-education-y. But I've turned a whole new leaf. I am a marketing strategist now. I am a proud marketer. I love marketing!

Here are four reasons why I believe marketing is the cool way to do powerful fraternity/sorority education.

### **The Power of a Narrative**

Does your fraternity/sorority community have a single, compelling, emotional story they're sharing with non-Greeks? Probably not. Most chapters don't. Most councils don't. Most communities don't. Most inter/national organizations, or for that matter umbrella groups don't.

In the absence of a compelling story, a story will be written for us. And we won't be the hero.

The moment a community decides upon a story – a marketing narrative – suddenly they have a rally cry. A marketing narrative can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. We live up to the stories we tell about ourselves. Marketing can be aspirational, not just informational – it can be, should

be, about what an organization is trying to become, not what it is or has been. Marketing is a premonition... a VISION.

Something I love about this is if you were to ask me to do my best “Leadership” seminar for fraternity/sorority leaders, I’d gladly volunteer. What would I do? I’d have the group identify their core story – their narrative. Because you can’t lead if you’re not going anywhere. You have to be about something to lead a group. Most fraternity/sorority leaders aren’t about anything real. “Leadership, Scholarship, Service, and Bro/Sisterhood” are so generic they don’t mean anything anymore.

My favorite example of a community choosing a powerful narrative comes from the Florida State University Panhellenic community. We (Innova Marketing, Inc.) worked with them to help uncover the story their wonderful community had to tell. Here’s the result:

*Below the surface there is pure strength. Below the surface there is natural beauty. Below the surface there is a drive to do real good in the world. This is true of every woman. And this is true of the Florida State Panhellenic community. We believe in the power of women challenging and supporting each other through self-discovery in college, and throughout a lifetime of actualizing the potential that lies just below the surface of each of us. (Read more and see the associated logo [here](#).)*

Now that community of women is about something! There is so much more than *marketing* within that paragraph, don’t you think?

### **“Know Your Audience”**

The first rule of marketing, advertising, and public relations is, “Know Your Audience.” Great marketers focus feverishly on the perspective, values, and desires of the people they’re aiming at. So much fraternity/sorority education is about... us. It’s about fraternity/sorority. It’s about reducing our risk. It’s about our service/philanthropy success. It’s about our values. It’s about our problems.

Knock it off.

Let’s think about other people for once. Let’s help our student leaders focus on the young men and women whose lives they can change with the gift of fraternity and sorority. Or let’s help them focus on the fears and hopes of parents. Or let’s help them focus on the perspectives of non-conformists, social justice activists, neighbors, law enforcement officers, faculty members, etc.

Marketing – good marketing – requires selflessness. It necessitates an empathetic approach to the world.

This brings me to the sentence I've spoken more than any other over the last couple of years: "GO GREEK! Is Not A Marketing Strategy."

We have to stop shouting. We have to cease our bragging, our boasting, and our pride. Fraternity/sorority is truly a wonderful thing, but less than 10% of college students on campuses where our organizations exist choose to join. The only people listening when we brag about our organizational awesomeness are ourselves or the people who are probably going to join us anyway.

We must start listening to the people we want but who probably won't show up (these are probably lower-risk, higher performing students). If we say anything, it should be a whisper into the ears of the young men and women who wouldn't normally respond to our "Go Greek!" shouts.

This is what we're trying to do with the #ReThinkGreek campaign. We have 110 campus and headquarters partners who we're so grateful are trying to do it with us. This campaign is aimed at a different audience. It is not a "Greek Life is awesome" campaign, it is a "You are probably awesome, and we'd like to get to know you" campaign. Learn more at [www.innovagreek.com/rethinkgreek](http://www.innovagreek.com/rethinkgreek). It's free for your campus.

### **Marketing is About Values**

We're pretty deep into the "live your values" era of fraternity/sorority life. Perhaps we're so deep that pretty much any educational programming about values feels cliché and pedantic to today's undergraduate leaders. I don't mean that they always live their values, I just mean they're sick of being told to do so.

That's where marketing comes in again. Good marketing education focuses on the fact that "your members are your marketers."

We have shared our [marketing manifesto](#) publicly – this is what we believe about fraternity/sorority marketing. There is a line in there that reads, "Marketing is a conversation. Social excellence on a larger scale. Marketing is done by the people. The brochures and brands just make it easier, broader, and more consistent. Marketing is emotional. It is an expression and exchange of values. It is a heart to heart exchange of beliefs. A nod of deep understanding and an affirmation of mutual worth. Our marketing must be rooted in human connection."

I really believe this, and so do great companies and organizations. Southwest Airlines. Disney. Nike. These aren't brands, they're lifestyles. Their logos, marks, and taglines are simply descriptions of the *people* who live the values of the company every day.

Marketing education is really “live your values” education, when done right. Shhhh.

### **A Battle Students Want to Fight**

Here’s a fun exercise. Go ask a fraternity/sorority leader what they’d be most excited to talk about:

1. Living your ritual
2. Hazing prevention
3. Alcohol abuse or sexual assault prevention
4. Improving our image/reputation as Greeks

Now, I don’t know what your students will choose, but most of the students I encounter will put #4 as one of their top two choices. There are other things absolutely worthy of talking about, but a whole lot of students get all kinds of worked up about fighting the stigma that surrounds fraternity/sorority.

Marketing education – taking control of the Greek Life story – is a battle they want to suit up for. I’ve found students to be energized, passionate, and willing to take action on this topic.

Of course, once I get them riled up, I’ll help them understand that no defensive PR strategy (responding to negative accusations protectively and with self-justification) has ever created a dramatic change in perception. I’ll teach them that in marketing/PR, the best defense is a good offense (a powerful narrative). I’ll teach them that, according to our research, unaffiliated students actually don’t hate us, they just don’t know us.

We found that when fraternity/sorority is described without using Greek letters or terminology, 91% of non-Greeks actually want to learn more. We also found that 42% of unaffiliated students actually have a high or neutral level of interest in Greek Life but less than 23% of them have ever even been approached about recruitment.

I believe our job as educators is to teach what students want to learn – or at least sometimes do that. A whole lot of fraternity/sorority leaders, and general members, desperately want to learn how to take back their story.

Those are four reasons why I believe marketing is actually a sneaky and kind of cool way to teach fraternity/sorority leaders powerful and important lessons about leadership, values, and the deeper lessons fraternity and sorority offer about life.

Go ahead. Try it. It’s like a secret FUN door into the real stuff you and I really want to teach.