

DEVELOPING A BOLD NEW WAY TO TELL THE STORY OF PURDUE

OF THE

NEXT

THE PERSISTENT PURSUIT

GIANT

LEAP





# The story of Purdue University is a powerful one.

With a long history of innovation, and legions of talented students, alumni, and faculty, Purdue University has a rich heritage of impact and accomplishment. Recently, as our sesquicentennial celebration wound down, the institution was at a crossroads.

The anniversary campaign carried the theme "150 Years of Giant Leaps": a reference to the university's STEM legacy, and a nod to Neil Armstrong and the 24 other astronauts among Purdue's alumni.

The initiative was a great success, honoring Purdue's past, envisioning the future and fostering a sense of pride among its extended community. And throughout its duration, it gave the institution a strong framework for its communications. But as the campaign came to a conclusion, the need became apparent for a comprehensive brand platform: one that did more to unite every voice, to push the university further, and to tell its story compellingly, over the long term.

This was the clear next step: to develop a lasting and meaningful brand platform. This was our next giant leap.



## A robust discovery process.

To start, we needed to fully understand the internal and external landscapes that Purdue was part of.

So we assembled an interdisciplinary team of researchers, strategists, marketers, communicators, writers, and designers—including members from the university, and from our partners: the branding firm Ologie, and the research firm Brandtrust. Our mutual objective: to define an authentic and differentiating brand platform for Purdue, one that would work for all facets of the institution.

Over several months, the team undertook a series of qualitative and quantitative research activities. Through individual and group interviews, communication audits, and analysis of existing research, we investigated questions like: What are the perceptions of Purdue's key stakeholders? How is the Purdue brand currently positioned? What about its peers and competitors?

One of the most valuable contributions was a composite transcript created by Brandtrust, using actual excerpts from interviews with admitted students and parents, current students, alumni, and faculty. It sketched out the emotional terrain and other related dynamics associated with the university, preserving the rich language that Purdue's constituents used to talk about their experiences.

**As the discovery phase came to a conclusion, several important themes emerged. In reviewing all of our findings and insights, we saw clearly that Purdue stood for three things:**

### INNOVATION

*Discoveries and outcomes that can change the world*

### PERSISTENCE

*A Boilermaker mindset*

### COLLABORATION

*Working together to solve complex problems*

***WE ALSO CONFIRMED THAT PURDUE WAS INDEED AN ELITE INSTITUTION AND A PRESTIGIOUS BRAND, VALUED FOR ITS AFFORDABILITY AND ITS PRACTICAL APPROACH TO PROBLEM SOLVING.***



## Defining Purdue's brand essence.

Next, these insights were translated into a clear, concise statement of who Purdue is as an institution. This brand essence had to be authentic, differentiating, and motivational. We needed people to react to it by saying, "Yes, that's us. That is so Purdue."

At this point, we discussed, debated, and interpreted the discovery findings in a collaborative workshop. This discussion fueled the crafting of a positioning statement, and from there, the development of our brand essence.

1

The positioning statement defines the core tenets of the brand:

2

The brand essence is the shortest and simplest articulation of what Purdue stands for:

WHO

*PURDUE UNIVERSITY IS ABOUT*

WHAT

*THE PERSISTENT PURSUIT OF INNOVATION*

HOW

*WHERE PEOPLE BRING THEIR BEST AND LEARN*

WHY

*TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD TOGETHER.*

*PERSISTENT INNOVATION.  
TOGETHER.*

# Purdue's value proposition:

## The give and the get.

At the heart of any brand strategy lies a robust value proposition: a core set of attributes and benefits that form the foundation for all messaging.

Our value proposition is organized under four complimentary pillars. These are the basic aspects of what makes the university so distinct and powerful:

RESEARCH

EDUCATION

EXPERIENCE

CULTURE

Each of these pillars demonstrates how Purdue supports its core attribute (delivering practical solutions for today's toughest challenges) and its core benefit (building a better world together). This framework was developed by categorizing the attributes and benefits unearthed in our discovery process,

and matching them with dozens of proof points. With the launch of the new strategy, this framework has begun guiding communications across all parts of the university.



## Evolving Purdue's brand voice:

## The language of innovation and collaboration.

Always, always, taking  
the next step, together.  
Because every giant  
leap starts with one  
small step.

THE PERSISTENT

# PURSUIT

OF THE NEXT GIANT LEAP

As Indiana's land-grant university, Purdue has many stories to tell: stories of science, technology, research, the humanities, student life, athletics, value and affordability in higher education and more. The language for the evolved Purdue brand had to be flexible enough to encompass all of these, and it needed to connect to the institution's proud legacy.

Our creative platform carried a compelling tagline: *the persistent pursuit of the next giant leap*. Grounded in the words of Neil Armstrong's historic achievement, it was an idea that no other university could lay claim to.

This concept involved illustrating the small steps required to realize giant, innovative leaps in thinking. It also spoke to the persistence at the heart of this work: it never ends or pauses, as relentless as the locomotive that bears Purdue's mark.

### Speaking with one voice.

The brand voice unites every story across the institution, drawing on the idea of pursuit —of the next breakthrough, the next innovation, the next solution — that drives the work of every Boilermaker.

There's also plenty of flexibility built into the Purdue voice. In testing with different audiences, we found that prospective and current students responded better to language about small steps and persistent efforts. Alumni and faculty, however, appreciated bigger messages that spoke directly to the giant leaps and sustained excellence that the institution makes possible.

FROM WHAT COULD BE TO WHAT  
WILL BECOME. FROM WHAT IF TO  
WHY NOT? FROM THIS'LL NEVER  
WORK TO THIS IS MY WORK. FROM  
WHERE WILL THIS TAKE US TO  
WHAT TOOK US SO LONG? FROM  
NOBODY'S EVER TRIED THIS  
BEFORE TO SOMEBODY WHO FOUND  
A WAY. FROM RISK-TAKER TO  
BOILERMAKER. FROM I WONDER  
TO I WILL. **THAT'S MY GIANT LEAP**

As we expanded the brand language, we developed a richer voice and a wider vocabulary for the university. This not only enabled the institution to speak together as one Purdue, but it allowed the institution to speak directly to each of its many audiences.



# Toward one Purdue:

# Identity and visual language.

As the brand began to take shape, it was clear that Purdue's diverse entities needed to be aligned in another way — visually. To do so, we identified several ways to strengthen and simplify the institution's visual language. The resulting visual language was tighter and more consistent, and better reinforced the Purdue master brand.

## VISUAL LANGUAGE

### PREVIOUS VISUAL EXPRESSION



Institutional visuals varied drastically from athletic visuals, pushed apart by an overly robust color palette and mismatched photographic approaches.

## IDENTITY

We created a unified identity, drawing on the "Motion P" symbol from the athletics sub-brand to anchor the institutional logo.

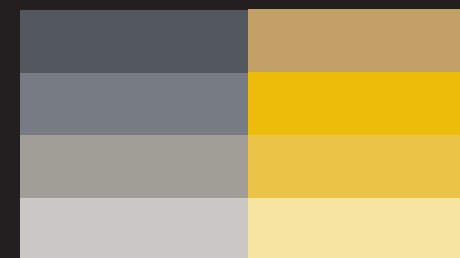
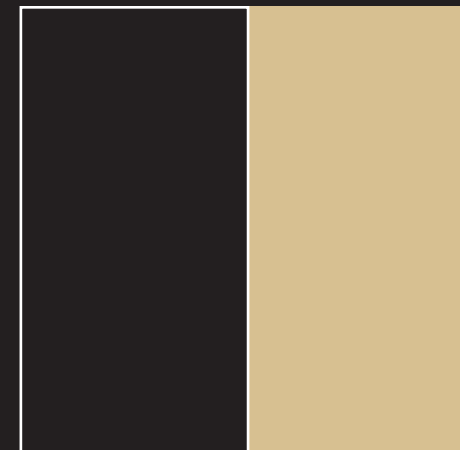
### EVOLVED IDENTITY



### FORMER IDENTITY

### EVOLVED VISUAL EXPRESSION

Our **color palette was narrowed**, focusing primarily on the legacy black and gold embraced by athletics, with a smaller selection of secondary colors informed by those two distinct color waves.



Our **updated typographic styles** were chosen because they work well across all media and expressions.

Aa

ACUMIN PRO

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UNITED SANS

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SOURCE SERIF PRO

A **consistent photographic and video style** was defined and applied across the organization.





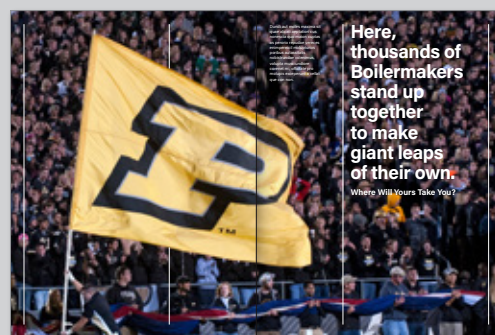
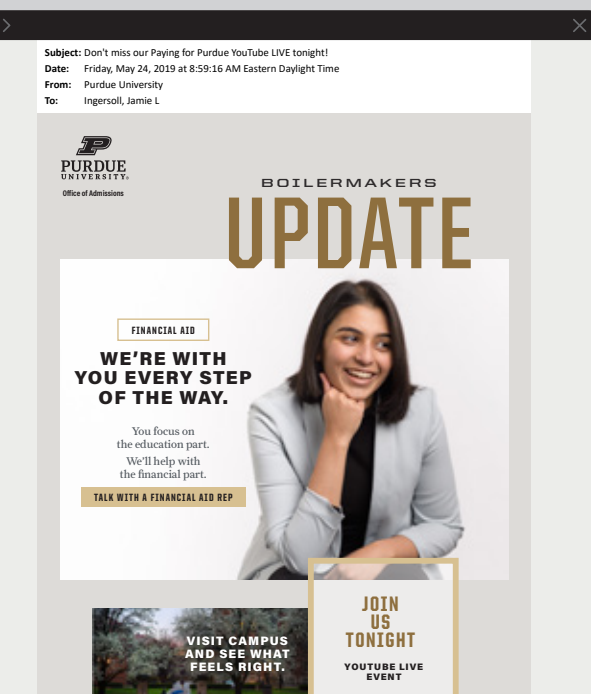
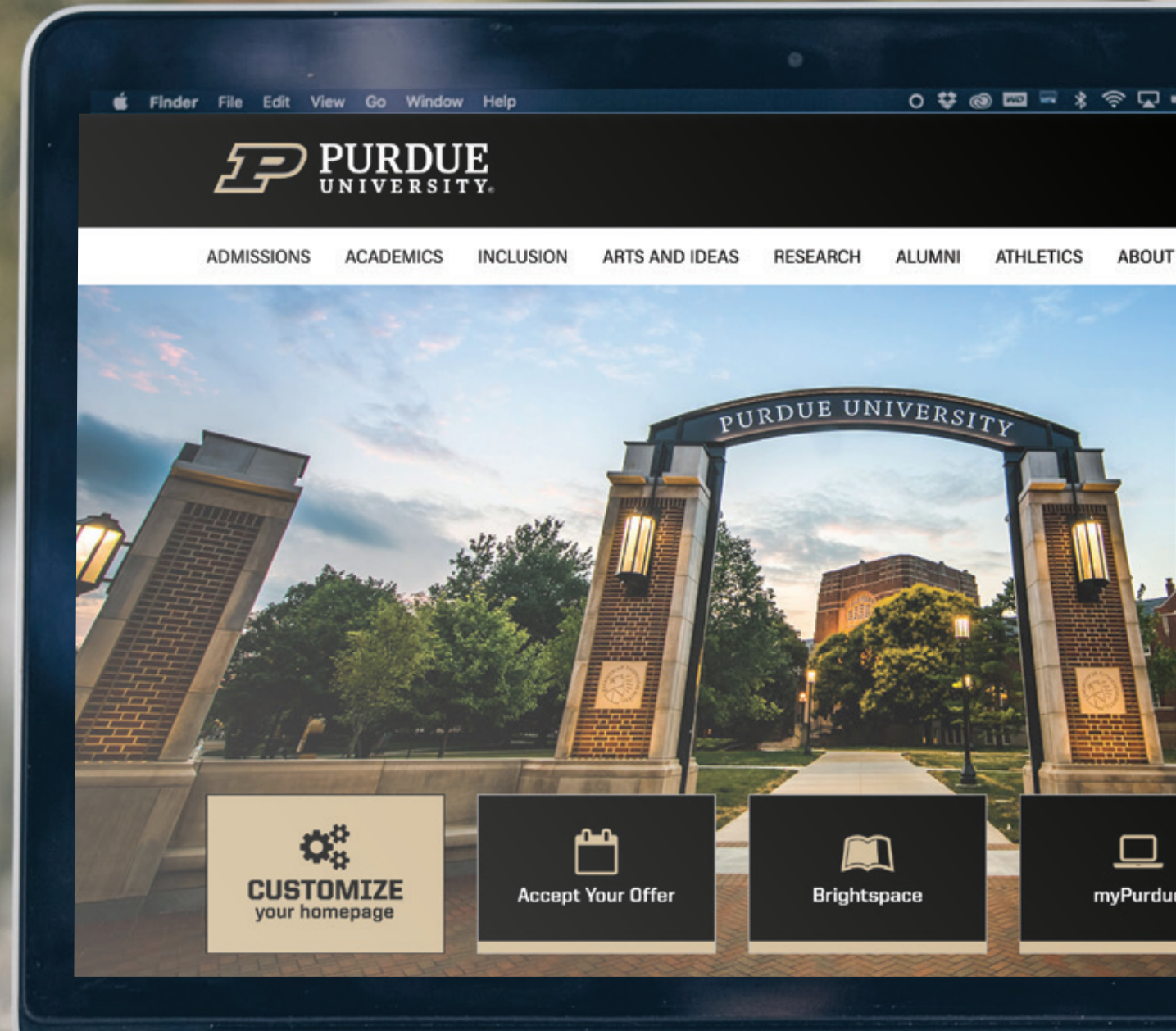
Bringing it all together with a bold new look and a powerful new voice.

TAKE ONE SMALL STEP  
WITH THE POWER TO CHANGE EVERYTHING



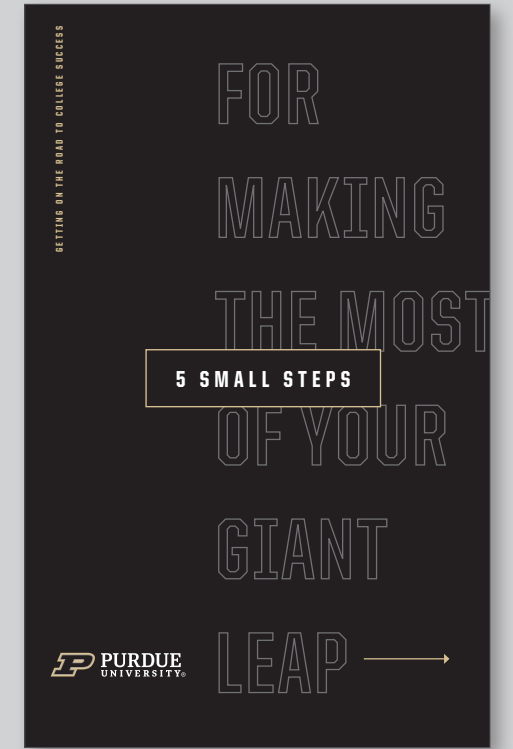
The new brand needed the flexibility to speak to all audiences and to carry a broad variety of messages, but with an identifiable, cohesive look and feel across all platforms.

FROM WHAT COULD BE TO WHAT WILL BECOME. FROM WHAT IF TO WHY NOT? FROM THIS'LL NEVER WORK TO THIS IS MY WORK. FROM WHERE WILL THIS TAKE US TO WHAT TOOK US SO LONG? FROM NOBODY'S EVER TRIED THIS BEFORE TO SOMEBODY WHO FOUND A WAY. FROM RISK-TAKER TO BOILERMAKER. FROM I WONDER TO I WILL. **THAT'S MY GIANT LEAP**





The creative platform was quickly put through its paces, appearing throughout campus and on billboards, in listeners' podcast feeds, and in the mailboxes of a new generation of Boilermakers.



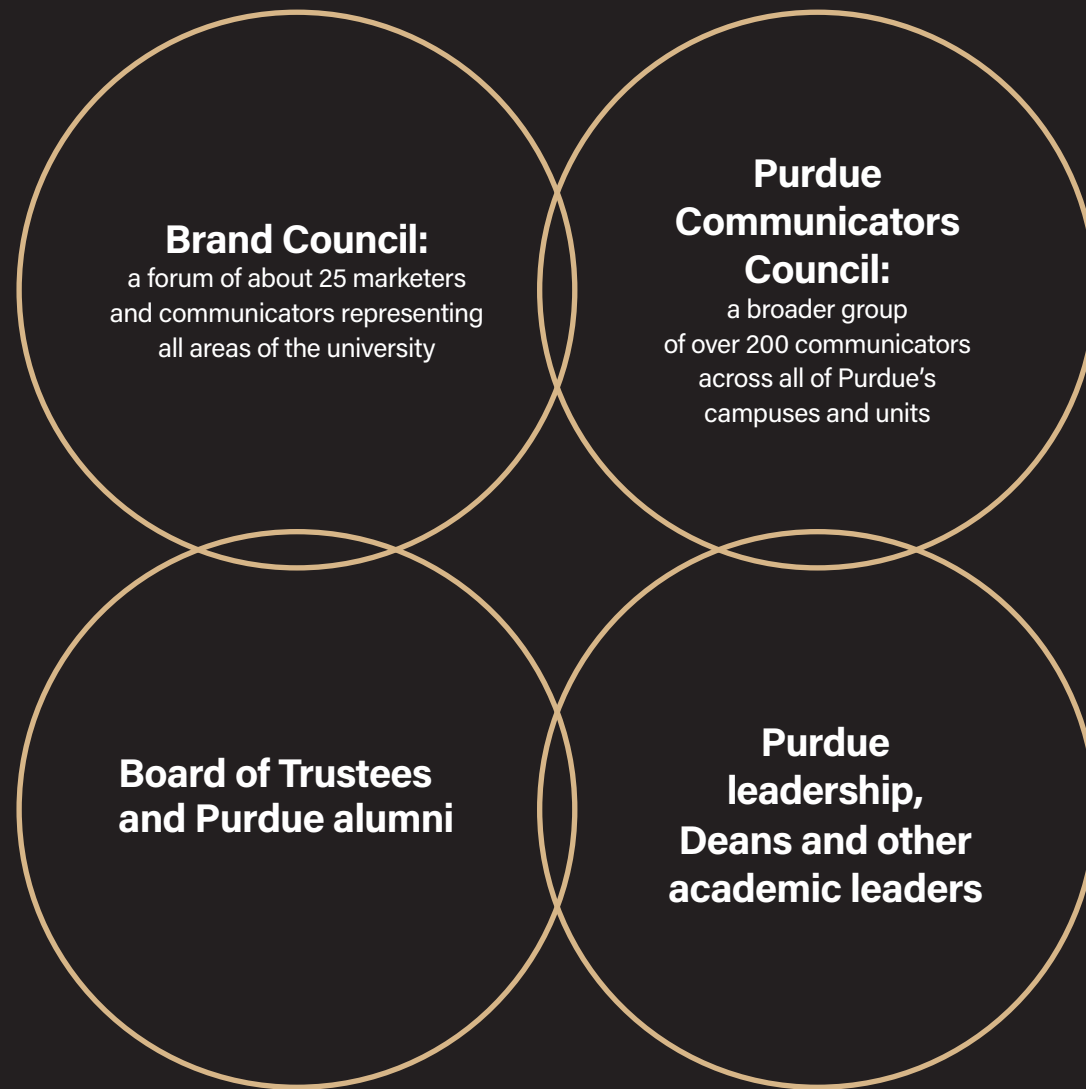


## Creating alignment:

## From brand council to brand launch.

To help create alignment around the brand work, Purdue's Office of Marketing and Media tapped several groups of stakeholders, who offered input and direction throughout the yearlong process.

## These included:



In addition to these, we also engaged with faculty, students and student groups, as well alumni via discussion groups and forums for feedback on concepts, language and other aspects of the brand.



**A high point of the project was a two-day conference to launch the brand, which featured a roster of speakers that included President Mitch Daniels. The event was attended by over 300 of Purdue's marketers and communicators from all across campus and the system.**



# Guidelines and governance:

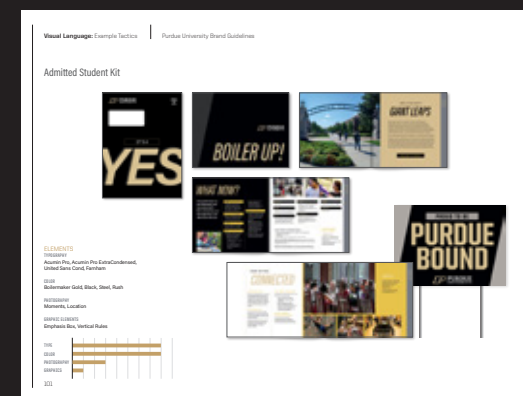
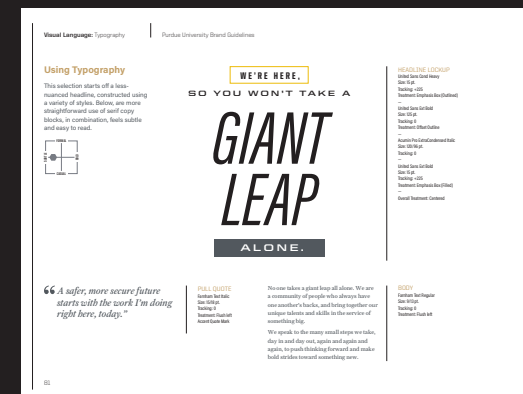
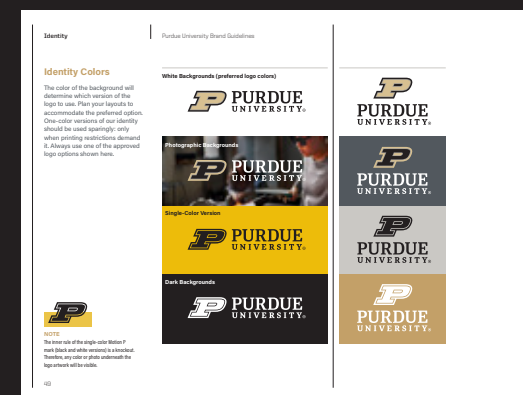
# Tools, training, and tactics for maintaining momentum.

Purdue launched the brand with a complete set of resources for the people who would be implementing it on the front line. Chief among them was a comprehensive set of brand guidelines, which were shared at the launch day and used for training communicators. This content—along with videos and other tactics—was designed to help move the Purdue brand toward a single voice, a single identity, and a unified message.

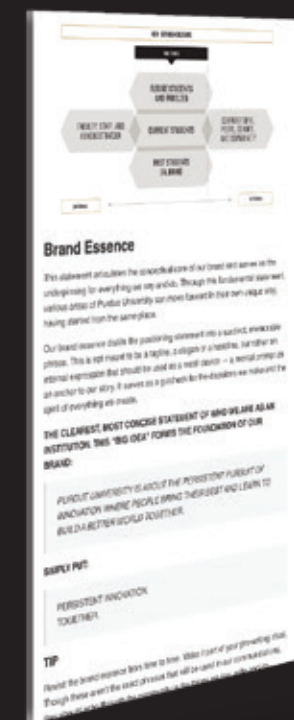
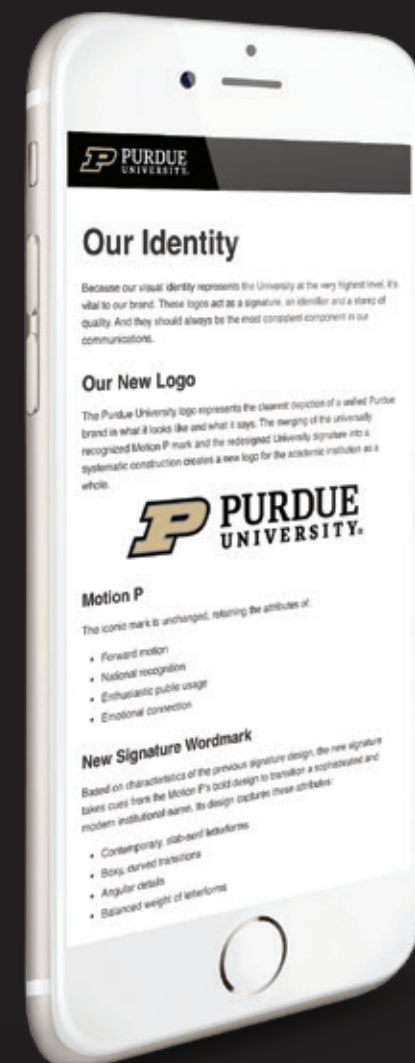
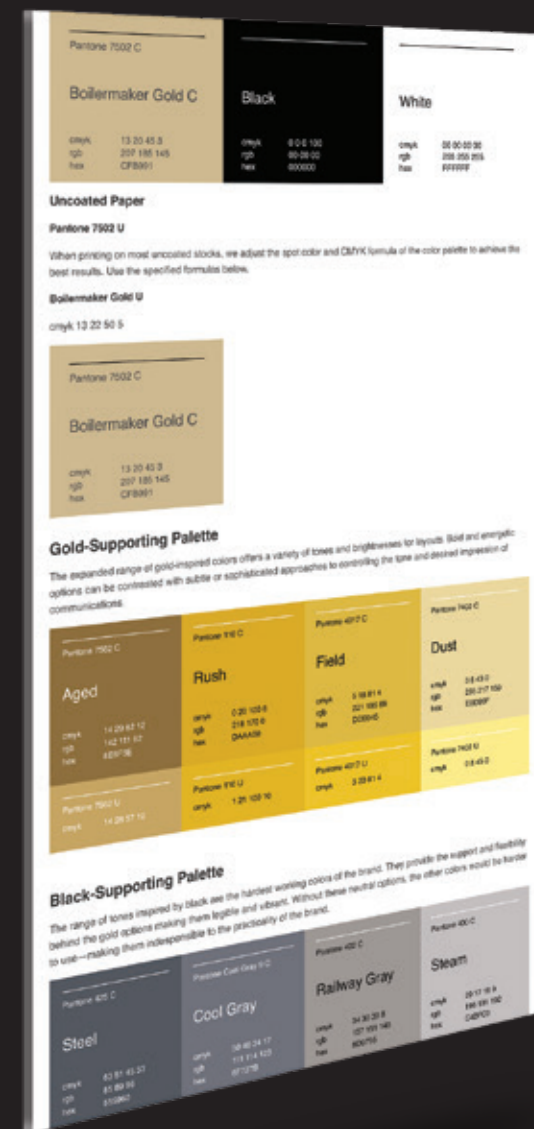
The university's Office of Marketing and Media manages all of these assets via a dynamic brand website and, with Ologie's support, makes continual updates to the visual language, verbal elements, and brand architecture.

# RESULTS

## Comprehensive Guidelines



## Brand Portal



After launching the new brand platform in early 2020, Purdue began to see results, including a record freshman class of over 8,900. That's an

# 11 PERCENT INCREASE OVER 2019.

Total followers have increased by 38,000 across all social media channels, which is

# AN INCREASE OF 42% YEAR OVER YEAR.

Engagement across all social media channels increased by **127% year over year**, including 207% on YouTube.



**ETHAN BRADEN**

Senior Vice President  
of Marketing and  
Communications

**Q: How is higher education marketing different from corporate marketing or marketing consumer brands like pharmaceuticals?**

I don't think it is that different. Higher education marketing is equally complex, with a diversity of target audiences to speak to, serve and delight. It is competitive, crowded, and often undifferentiated. Compared to most corporate marketing, where external communication is very tight and limited to a very few individuals, there are hundreds speaking daily on behalf of a college or university, so message consistency and effectiveness is more difficult. Higher ed is ripe for and responds to the same marketing discipline and fundamentals (deep audience understanding, segmentation, sound positioning, tested messaging, and measurement), as well as the innovations we see more often across the corporate sector (AI, AR/VR, automation, analytics).

**Q: How did you help create and ensure broad adoption of the brand evolution by the colleges, departments, and units?**

This is key. In November 2018, months before the evolution process even began, we formed a Brand Council, a representative body composed of the lead marketers and communicators from about 25 colleges and departments (including athletics, development, alumni, and others), and began meeting monthly. That group helped guide the brand evolution work, with the belief that people support that which they create. We also worked to build a brand platform that embodies an aligned essence, unifies our collective efforts, and conveys a "One Purdue" message, but one that can flex and accommodate thoughtful localization to target audiences from prospective students to our largest of donors. Finally, we built and continue to evolve a robust arsenal of brand resources at

[brand.purdue.edu](http://brand.purdue.edu) (guides, tools, templates, assets) to support excellent, unit-level execution, instead of leaving them to create on their own.

**Q: What was your biggest obstacle as you led the university through this brand evolution process? And your biggest asset?**

The biggest obstacle—and this is not unique to Purdue University or higher education whatsoever—was the lack of marketing discipline toward spending the requisite time and effort to first build a deep understanding of audiences, solid insights, and a sound strategy. Many people want to jump straight to tactics, the fun stuff: taglines and logos. As Phil Dusenberry wrote, "One great insight is worth a thousand good ideas." Do the hard work first—it can be fun too.

The biggest asset? There were two. One, this strong, precious, 150-year-old brand, Purdue University. Talk about being spoiled with reasons to believe and having a giant lump of clay to mold something beautiful. And two, some very talented teammates, faculty, alumni and partners, including Kati Pratt ('06), Kelly Hiller, colleagues in athletics, Dave Moore ('86), David Clifton ('82), BrandTrust, Ologie, and many others who helped propel the brand launch.

**Q: What do you feel are the most differentiating characteristics of the Purdue brand? How will they serve the university's strategic objectives over the years ahead?**

I believe in our essence: this unique combination of relentless persistence (these never-say-die Boilermakers) and the discovery and implementation of world-changing ideas (innovation) within a familiar, collaborative environment. Any one of the three aspects can be found elsewhere. I don't know of another place with all three like Purdue, and I'm bullish on this equation to continue to produce leaders who solve the world's toughest challenges in the future.

**Q: How did you evolve your in-house team to both launch and manage the new brand platform in today's competitive higher ed market?**

We have evolved the team guided by our goals and our organizational virtues. We strive to (1) cultivate, excite, and unite a world-class marketing community; (2) become the driver, not the vehicle, of excellent brand positioning, promotion, and preservation; and (3) amplify audience awareness and affinity for Purdue University. We want empowered, optimistic, and caring people who are committed to excellence. We want to drive the Purdue brand like no one has ever seen before and build a culture that people long to join. So we have worked to build a team around these ideals and have added members accordingly.

**Q: What role did President Daniels and the Purdue Board play in this brand evolution? And what about deans and other leaders across campus?**

Chairman Berghoff, the Board of Trustees, President Daniels, Provost Akridge, Kris Wong-Davis (Vice Provost for Enrollment Management), our Deans, Purdue Alumni Assoc. reps and many others were nothing but supportive, championing the efforts to position and communicate Purdue University's value offering in the clearest and most compelling fashion. They too want to win the hearts and minds of Boilermaker students and their families, as well as faculty, staff, alumni, research partners, and anyone else who is looking to build a better world together in the future.

**Q: Purdue University has frozen tuition for the last nine years. What role does affordability play in the brand essence and core value proposition?**

There's no question that affordability and accessibility are key contributors to our strong reputation and our growing acclaim for the better part of the last decade, especially as concerns about the price and diminishing value of higher education increase. They are critical reasons to believe in Purdue University today, and they mean so much to the students and families who benefit from them, or have benefited, as well as the alumni who look on with great admiration for this financial prudence.

But for those who graduated before 2012, it may not be why they chose or fell in love with Purdue University. Their emotional drivers and connections are different. So, we have worked hard to blend an enduring brand essence of persistence, innovation and collaboration

— ideas which cut across and unite generations of Boilermakers— with the amazing value benefit that President Daniels and the Board of Trustees have spearheaded since 2012, into the most compelling, overall package we can possibly imagine for a student and family today.

**Q: Given that you launched about 60 days before the COVID-19 pandemic struck the United States, how do you see the Purdue brand helping the university face this crisis?**

Has there ever been a greater need for places that are about the persistent pursuit of innovation, where people bring their best and learn to build a better world together? The pandemic is an opportunity for all of us at Purdue to turn to and ardently live our brand, in how we communicate and make decisions.

**"The biggest obstacle—and this is not unique to Purdue University or higher education whatsoever—was the need to instill and maintain a marketing discipline toward spending the requisite time and effort to first build a deep understanding of audiences, solid insights, and a sound strategy. Many people want to jump straight to tactics, the fun stuff: taglines and logos. Do the hard work first—it can be fun too."**



