

Building Education Brands

WINDSWEPT PALMS, BREAKING SURF, AND LUSH JUNGLES are just a few of the images that may greet international students thinking about studying in New Zealand. But they'll also find stories about innovative research projects and collaboration between universities and high-tech companies. The island nation's education brand, New Zealand Educated, attempts to capture the entirety of the study abroad experience—from academic offerings to lifestyle factors.

Branding and marketing are no longer the exclusive purview of the business world. While individual higher education institutions have long been aware of the benefits of developing a strong profile, countries and regions are now jumping on the branding bandwagon. These educational brands are closely linked to national image campaigns, especially in relation to trade and tourism.

Creating National Brands

Smaller countries like New Zealand and Norway have successfully boosted their national education profiles through the creation of national study brands, while Denmark, the Netherlands, and Canada have launched their own national image campaigns earlier this year.

In New Zealand, international education contributes more than 1.6 billion (U.S.) to its economy each year, and the creation of a national education brand has been one way to put the country's higher education system on the map. The country launched its educational brand in 2001 and overhauled it in 2006–2007.

"A national brand is very important to New Zealand. Our biggest challenge as a country in attracting international students is getting 'on their radar' at all, and if they have heard of New Zealand, getting 'on their radar' in an education context. Our tourism image is quite well known, but none of the beautiful images of land and mountains obviously say 'education!'" says Stuart Boag, communications director of Education New Zealand.

Part of the task in brand development is capturing what makes education in a particular country unique, and in the case of New Zealand, raising the profile for the education system as a whole, rather than for a particular institution.

"Our research continually tells us that students who do come to New Zealand make the decision primarily to come to New Zealand, then they choose an institution, or a region. This is different from countries like the U.S. or U.K., where the institution or region is far more the initial driver....We do not have a 'halo effect' in the way that Oxbridge or the Ivy League are for their respective countries," says Boag.

For smaller countries, an educational brand is also a way to promote educational merits that may otherwise remain unknown. Even though New Zealand scores well on international educational rankings such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) this does not by itself translate into increased numbers of international students.

"The positioning of our education system is also important. Although New Zealand has one of the finest education systems in the world, this reality is not readily known or understood by most intending students. So we have a dual job: putting New Zealand as a country on the choice set and letting people know that we have a top education system," says Boag.

United States Branding Efforts

The United States is taking a slightly different approach. While individual institutions such as Stanford and Harvard still enjoy unparalleled name recognition, the diversity and breadth of U.S. higher education have made it difficult to market the country as a whole. A new initiative, however, promotes U.S. education in target markets.



In November 2006 the United States launched its first “Electronic Education Fair”—a multimedia campaign including television documentaries featuring the testimonials of current students and a Web portal—in China, the second largest market for U.S. educational exports. The initiative was the outcome of the University President’s Summit on International Education in January 2006, where university officials called on the U.S. government to play a greater role in the promotion of U.S. education abroad.

Alexander C. Feldman, senior advisor to the under secretary for International Trade at the U.S. Department of Commerce, says that while the United States already does a lot to promote U.S. education abroad, this is the first major marketing campaign it has launched. “This is really the first major marketing campaign that the U.S. has undertaken in a sort of concerted way, using television, the Internet, DVDs, and on-the-ground activities to really focus our efforts on spreading the word to students internationally that America’s doors continue to be open,” he says.

And China is just the beginning. In December 2007, a similar campaign was rolled out in India, which is the leading country of origin for international students in the United States, with more than 83,000 students on U.S. campuses.

Destinations by State

In addition to increased efforts on the national level, individual states are promoting themselves as education abroad destinations. Indiana, for instance, broadcasts the benefits of its educational system under the brand of “Destination Indiana,” which was formed by the International Trade Division of the Indiana Department of Commerce and the Indiana Consortium for International Programs. There are more than 30 member institutions across the state.

“We wanted to better market our tertiary institutions in Indiana...[because] international students frequently look to the east and west coasts,” says Hugh McGuigan, chair of Destination Indiana

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and director of international studies at Valparaiso University.

“Indiana exports many products worldwide. Education is one of them. When the consortium was formed [in 2001], it was decided that we could market ourselves better as a consortium than as individual universities—strength in numbers,” he says.

As part of the consortium, member institutions have participated in recruiting trips together and hosted EducationUSA advisers prior to NAFSA’s annual conference for a mini-college fair and school visits. Another initiative, the Live Video College Fair, put member institutions in touch with advising centers in the Middle East and Indonesia.

“Destination Indiana has really allowed us to extend the network of recruitment opportunities to attract students as well as chances

to do some service-oriented projects,” says Marty Bennett, treasurer for Destination Indiana and director of international services at Ball State University.

However, McGuigan is quick to point out that the consortium is a complement to the marketing done by individual institutions. “Destination Indiana is just one tool that all of the schools are linked to. Each school does its own thing. Only a small percentage of our recruiting initiatives are related to Destination Indiana,” he says.

Whatever the tools used, the state is doing something right. According to the Institute of International Education’s (IIE) *Open Doors* data, between 2002–03 and 2006–07, Indiana has risen from number 13 to number 10 as the most popular destination state in the United States for foreign students.

Regional Brands in Other Countries

The United States is not the only country where states have made efforts to promote themselves as study abroad destinations. In Germany the southwestern state of Baden-Württemberg is marketing itself as one of the country’s premier study destinations.

Ullrich Mack, head of the division for education and research at Baden-Württemberg International, says they have been involved with marketing the region as an economic hub for almost 25 years, and the

educational brand was a natural extension. “We have really developed a brand as one of the most dynamic economic regions of Germany, and we wanted to extend this brand to the field of higher education and research,” he says.

Educational marketing began in 2005 and

activities include the creation of Web sites and other promotional materials, as well as participation in international education fairs. As in Indiana, it may also be a case of strength in numbers.



“Baden-Württemberg is the state in Germany that has the largest number of institutions of higher education so it’s really worth doing marketing on the regional level,” Mack says.

Is Regional Branding Always a Good Idea?

However, a representative of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the national body tasked with promoting German higher education abroad, wonders if regional marketing really makes sense in the German context. “We’ve been charged to run a nationwide campaign, and of course the states (*länder*) are free to run their own programs. While joining efforts at the state and federal level makes sense, branding tertiary education abroad is only efficient on an

institutional and a national level. These states are known inside of Germany, but it is very difficult to get that message across abroad,” says Alexander Haridi, desk officer within the DAAD marketing department.

DAAD, originally a scholarship-granting organization, has only been involved with marketing since 2000. “Historically, it is important to see that higher education has been viewed as a public commodity. That’s why we are sort of latecomers on the international level. Up to the late 1990s, international exchange was seen as a part of our cultural activities, but not as a part of the economic realm. Then the analysis changed and we have been involved with actively marketing our education system for the last eight or nine years,” Haridi says.

Germany is not the only European country where marketing activities have only recently taken off. Among the Nordic countries, Norway is at the front of the pack with the development of its higher education brand, “Look up—study in Norway.” Bente Gundersen, adviser for international promotion at the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU), says the brand was launched

in 2005, primarily targeting European and North American students.

The brand platform involves two values: accessibility and interaction. “The concept underlying everything is accessibility. As an international student, you have easy access to everything: the university, your professors, and the local community. Interaction refers to the short distance between professors and students, a focus on teamwork, and the sharing of knowledge,” Gundersen says.

Marketing materials include word pairs

such as “Study/Play,” “Aspire/Inspire,” and “Future/Now” that emphasize both the educational and lifestyle aspects of higher education in Norway.

Gundersen says that creating a national brand is not about money as the issue of charging tuition fees for international students has

not been on the Norwegian political agenda. Furthermore, she says the recruitment aim is about attracting quality, not quantity.

“We believe that international academic mobility and internationalization enhance the quality of higher education and research.

Hence, our main reasons to attract foreign students, researchers, and faculty members are not economic,

but they are built on a belief that internationalization increases the quality of higher education and research,” she says.

“Promotional activities are seen as a necessary response to the increased competition between countries to attract the talented students. Furthermore, there seems to be growing awareness that we have to be a part of the global education market if we want to participate in internationalization.”

Branding for Profit and Altruism in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom, on the other hand, has seen a successful marriage of for-profit education and more altruistic goals such as increased international cooperation. “There



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is an economic value, and that’s certainly not being criticized, because I think we are doing [marketing] in a way that is not focusing simply on that. We’re not just doing it in terms of reaping the monetary benefits, but we are really internationalizing our educational offer,” says Andrew King, assistant director of the Education UK Marketing Division of the British Council.

Britain has one of the more well-known educational brands, Education UK, developed under the auspices of the British Council. After the success of its educational marketing campaign launched in 1999, the British Council redeployed its brand in 2006 following research on the effect of culture on communication about education.

King says that one of the cornerstones of the Education UK brand has been a message framework

that captures both the “factual elements” and “emotional values” of British education. “We are also trying to identify what is really distinctive about the UK offer. Part of it is really focusing on the fact that we are trying to position ourselves as a very innovative study destination, but also one that is steeped in history,” he says.

More Nations Start Education Brands

Several countries are just about to jump on the branding bandwagon. Canada unveiled its new national brand at the NAFSA conference in Washington in May 2008. A national brand has been controversial in the past because higher education is under the



jurisdiction of the provinces, while the federal government is responsible for marketing higher education.

Denmark launched a national education brand in March 2008. A national action plan for global marketing of Denmark was adopted in 2007, and this included promoting Denmark as a creative nation, a tourist destination, an investment location, and as a study destination.

To promote Danish higher education abroad, a new marketing unit at CIRIUS, an agency under the Danish Ministry of Science, was established in September 2007. The new Danish brand is based on three words: think, play and participate. "Critical thinking, active participation, and an informal relationship between students and professors are some of the key features of

Danish higher education [that we want to capture in our brand]," says Jesper Langergaard, chief adviser at CIRIUS.

In the Netherlands, a new branding campaign and logo was launched in late January of this year. The Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC) has traditionally been the intermediary between the Dutch government and individual institutions in facilitating all forms of international activities. As in other countries, "marketing is the new kid on the block," says NUFFIC communications director Hanneke Teekens.

The visual identity of the new brand, Study in Holland, is a tilted logo resembling a ribbon, featuring the slogan "Open to international minds." Cast in the typically Dutch orange, the design also includes symbols traditionally associated with the country, such as tulips and water, as well as

other symbols such as a light bulb and wind turbines, touching on ideas such as innovation and sustainability.

But a word of warning for all of the brand newcomers: make sure you send the right message. Michael Gallagher, executive director of a group of eight of Australia's most prestigious universities, said in a November 2007 speech that "Brand Australia" might backfire as the images of "sun, surf, and sex... surrounding much of Australia's international education marketing send messages other than valuing intellectual achievement."

The trick for Denmark, the Netherlands, and Canada, then, will be to figure out how to serve the brain food alongside the barbecue. **IE**

CHARLOTTE WEST, an expatriate from the United States and former Fulbright scholar, is a freelance writer in Stockholm, Sweden. Her last article for *IE* was "Quality Assurance in European Higher Education" in the July/August 2008 issue.

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303-785-8881
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